

**REPRESENTATION AND MEANING:
THE ERASURE OF MEDIATION IN CONTEMPORARY
TEXT THEORY**

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Abstract

This thesis undertakes an examination of theories describing the generation of meaning in various forms of representation, with specific reference to literary texts, photography and cinema. Proceeding from Derrida's claim that all signification may be classed as a general form of *Writing*, I consider the consequences of analysing the individual forms of representation from within a general system.

The classical representation of self-presence in speech is examined, and the metaphysical notions derived from the apparent proximity of voice to thought, on the basis of instantaneous production, are challenged. As a result, the claims regarding presence and atemporality in the analogical representation of the photograph and the motion picture projection are critically examined; and the closure of mediation and meaning in the speech/writing and author/text hierarchies is subjected to deconstructionist analysis. Text theory often acknowledges Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Lacan's theory of the signification of desire is evaluated for its relationship to traditional models of representation. The Lacanian influence in Barthes's work is traced through the notion of textual desire developed in *S/Z*, and Barthes's claims regarding the meaning of myth and code are examined for their erasure of textual mediation.

With the conclusion that claims to "truth" and the original encounter of "presence" in representation are founded on erasure and the privileging of secondary phenomena, the thesis incorporates examples of texts, such as *Desperately Seeking Susan*, which evoke the traditionally elided material; because the label "feminine" is usually applied to the excluded features of representation, the contemporary work in this area often takes a feminist approach, challenging the phallogocentric tradition of Western society.

1

The Nature of Representation

1.1. *Introduction*

The classical understanding of representation is based upon substitution, in which the representative presence replaces and maintains the presence of the original, absent entity. Similarly, the everyday use of the term representation implies the substitution of an original entity for another which is equivalent to, or derived from, the original; the representative gains its identity from the original and exists only while the original does. For example, the electorate is substituted in the parliamentary arena for the political representative on the basis of their similar concerns and priorities; artistic representation is generally expected to reproduce the sensation of the reality depicted and provide a "window" to the absent scene. The verbal or written description is often expected to replace the experience of the actual event, and the well chosen representation, it is believed, may evoke or relay the particular emotional experience of the author or artist to the subject. Representation is a common event in social and textual discourse; however, the classical suppositions about the respective natures and the similarity between substitute and original implicitly raise questions of actual identity when representations are formulated, and in some cases parties represented may object to the implicit statement that their identity is the origin of the representation.

The nature of representation, as a secondary phenomenon, implies that it has an origin, and since the origin is posited as an autonomous plenitude, classical representation has attempted to ensure the faithfulness of the secondary copy to the primary original. The strategy most commonly used is the elision of the mediation, either through a privileged context or through the use of a medium which is considered to present minimal distortion. Context and medium are implicitly connected, as in the spoken utterance. To enhance the validity of the representation of significant concepts, such as "truth," motifs are relied upon, as in the case of "the woman." The erasure of

mediation evoked by such motifs derives from the inherent meaning they are believed to embody, however, the meaning is merely the displaced context of the relationship of desire between the oppositional categories of masculine and feminine. That is, the position of the feminine Other is connoted as identical to the position of "truth" as the other of representation, so an essentialist closure is placed on the representation of femininity. The validity of the transparent motif may be questioned if the origin is posited as a secondary phenomenon itself, having no independent existence outside the differential realm of representation. The nature of representation may be considered as that which erases itself by appearing to conceal its origin and presenting itself as a secondary phenomenon. The differential system of signification supports this hypothesis, and I examine various claims relating to the transparency of mediation, in order to determine the complicity between the mediation of representation and the creation of the origin.

The "woman" in film and literature is often represented as an object of spectacle, and the female body is presented as the site where the essence of sexuality is readily apparent. I place quotation marks in reference to "the woman" as an indication that the term is a figure which has significance within the system of Western philosophy. However, tracing the term to a referent is an essentialising closure, since the textual function is the erasure of the mediation on the basis that "the woman" is an example providing metaphorical transparency, in relation to logocentric discourse. Derrida's observations on the significance of supplementary presence are incorporated in the following analysis, which focusses on the scene of representation and the critical acknowledgement or ellipsis of the mediation of the signified. All names adhere to Western metaphysics (as I discuss in this chapter), however, the representation of women extends its essentialist motif into arts, literature and Western values in general. The displacement of the name of "the woman" in the context of representation and the erasure of mediation is significant in relation to the nature of the text representing the figure, and the nature of the claims made through "the woman" as if the context were not one of representation. Meaning, and therefore the meaning of "the woman," is treated as something which is a secondary

representation in the text, rather than as something which is intrinsically dependent on representation for the possibility of its origination. The textual representation further excludes women artists and authors from the site of artist production, on the critical grounds that their relationship to the Symbolic nature of the signified is secondary. I discuss the work of some women artists who challenge the traditional models of artistic production in the context of the subjective presence within the work.

Traditional concepts of plot and narrative explain textual representation as though it were subject to real causality in a spatio-temporal continuum, while the signified's differential origin denies the referent an originary position. The representation of desire in the text often privileges masculine heterosexual desire as the impetus of narrative development, yet conclusions drawn from Lacan's account of desire in language and Barthes's investigation of the realist novel suggest that the sign is detached from the origin of the message and has no direct relationship with a central meaning. The semiotic system supported by Western philosophy is examined below, along with the description of the process of signification which erases the text from the scene of representation and treats meaning as a self-present feature of representation.

1.2. The Original Plenitude

The notion that representation is substitution implies the existence of an original object, which motivates the form of the substitute. The process of substitution implicitly holds that the substitute is different from that which is absent, and that it defers the moment of encounter with the thing represented. The representation is therefore the sign of the original object, and as Derrida notes, the representation effected by the sign in classical semiology is "both *secondary* and *provisional*" (1982a, 9): the secondariness results from its derivation from the lost presence, and it is provisional because the sign is a movement toward the missing presence. For the classical sign to replace the missing presence, the original and the substitute must have in essence similar qualities, therefore, there is continuity between the substitute and the absent entity, and they may be described as the same, yet different.

The substitution of the original is a form of repetition, because the object is being *re-presented*, yet, repetition can only proliferate presence through reference to an original entity, if the classical representation is to remain genuine. The repetition is an operation of supplementation which "is not exhibited as a break in presence, but rather as a reparation and a continuous, homogeneous modification of presence in representation" (Derrida 1982a, 313). This explanation allows the original object to repeat itself, within itself, in sending out a representation, and claims that signification is produced by the relationship of sign to referent, rather than by the differential structure of the sign. The original plenitude can only be categorised as an autonomous presence if the substitution in representation is modelled on an active process, emanating from a primary source; otherwise, allowing the sign an independent presence as mediator would disrupt the theoretical continuity of presence between the sign and referent, and imply that the referent passively receives its identity from the sign.

Derrida takes up the classical notion of representation as *sending out*, and examines the behaviour of the representative, using examples such as the envoy, emissary, and political delegation which maintain contact with their origins by *sending back* reports (1982b, 324); and strategically using, as that issued in representation, the term *envoi*, with its multiple connotations of "sending," "signing off," and "urgent dispatch," he introduces as the return to the original, *renvoi*, which is also the term for the footnoting of the text. The footnote does not direct the reader to an original source, but may proliferate diverse points of origin which are brought together by the text, which has no authority over them and where they do not appear with a representative structure (Derrida 1982b, 324); that is, the text which is proposed as a continuous modification of presence is subjected to differentiation and deferral of autonomy in the footnote, so the *renvois* are excluded from what is termed the representative nature of the text. The footnote is an explicit case of the property of all representation, that is, the meaning and authority conveyed by the representative are derived from other forms of representation rather than an original plenitude; the authority of each text is dispersed among those to which it refers, and those other texts also depend on other texts, so the difference and deferral of

final authoritative presence results in the text's becoming part of the chain of meaning, without dependence on an ultimate, primary text. The empirical existence of the footnote in a text does not alter the text's status, it is the possibility of the footnoting dissemination which causes the text's autonomy to be established and negated, in a self-effacing operation. The autonomy of the text, which is ascertained through its difference from other texts, represents the erasure of the other texts from its structure. A similar effacement is observed by Saussure in the autonomy of the sign.

Saussure defines the sign as both arbitrary and differential, concluding that "in language there are only differences *without positive terms*" (1959, 120). Representation derived from the sign deferring the presence of the missing object is proved a misconception, since the signified of the sign is differentially determined by other signs, and the referent is only arbitrarily linked to the sign. Saussure envisages the sign as a unity, but states that the substance of the sign is of less importance than the surrounding signs; from this, Derrida concludes that the signified concept must be denied an independent presence "in and of itself" (1982a, 11), because it is a site which depends on its surrounding terms without a fixed identity inside or outside the signifying system. Saussure attributes the original possibility of signification to the voice, and places writing in a supplementary relationship with speech, demonstrating the classical notion that the sign is a supplement to the original. Derrida finds that difference and deferral have their effect not just within the unified, meaningful sign but in the possibility of signification itself, and he describes the effect that allows signification, *différance*, not as a concept which may be applied to a system, but as the effect of the system.

1.3. Truth in Representation

Différance is not a concept, and cannot be applied in teleological fashion to allow deductions toward a theological truth. The use of *différance* to explain representation cannot result in the replacement of essentialist representation with a new, more truthful form because the form of truth already established by Western philosophy is the result of the differential system. The effacement of the mediation of the signifier "is the condition

of the very idea of truth" (Derrida 1976, 20), and leads to the association of truth and presence on the basis of the erasure of their founding principle (*différance*). By examining the representation of truth within Western metaphysics, and recognising the sign as the effect of difference and deferral, the absolute value of truth as a theological entity may be refuted. Representation is only possible through the sign, so the representation which aims to avoid imposing essentialist definitions is restricted to utilising the established economy of presence to raise questions about identity and difference.

Post-structuralist criticism of traditional textual practice does not result in a new economy of the text, but may re-align the reader's expectations. Barthes suggests that the reader becomes the new site of the text's meaning, as meaning is constructed in the *writerly* reading. The text presenting a multiplicity of readings is non-representational, in the classical sense, because it attempts no closure and encourages the slippage of the signifier, and the text's emphasis on the sign as the site of representation, and not the transference from a primary source, is anti-essentialist, although the reader who strives to create essentialising closure is always liable to do so. The closed, essentialist text is a product of critical practice, not the system of signification which depends on *différance*, and alternative critical practice is equally important with alternative textual practice. Barthes's reading of Balzac in *S/Z* questions the locus of meaning in the reader's encounter with the text, and distinguishes between reading which places arbitrary limitations on the text's signification and the inherently writerly aspect of all reading, which acknowledges the openness of the signifying chain. The textual examples from film and literature in the following sections are selected to demonstrate various forms of textual closure, with some examples of the erasure of mediation which co-erces the reader into accepting the closure that Western philosophy requires for the stability of its values. These values are implicit in various social products, film and literature, for example. The web of intertextual forms provides a complex structure which cannot easily be recast, and in its institutionally entrenched form may displace itself to appropriate the activity which attempts to situate itself outside the discursive norms; however, the potential for change

does exist or new critical forms would never develop to challenge the institution. I examine some of the directions in which change may proceed in the work of women artists, such as Kolbowski and Sherman, who challenge the patriarchal exclusion of women from textual production, in the general sense. The patriarchal closure of meaning naturalises the artistic signified in "the woman," and the autonomous activity of women artists threatens the traditional legitimacy which the figure of "the woman" conveys to the topic of the work.

1.4. Presence and Absence

Before discussing instances of the textual economy of representation, the metaphysical framework that inscribes the subject with presence, and supports the binary opposition within which the sign is hierarchically divided as speech and writing, is examined. The following is a summary of the claims examined in this section. The representation of the subject in Western philosophy constructs the presence which representation mediates, and this presence is realised in the cogito. The presence of the self must be irreducible for its acceptance by Western thought, and because the cogito depends on the mediation of the sign, the sign is appropriated in its spoken form as that nearest the interior essence of the subject. The resulting division of speech and writing is part of the system of opposition which represents entities through binary categories based on the certainty of presence in the subject; representation is traditionally motivated to provide substitution on the presumption that an original essence exists and can be deferred through the sign. The following description of the sign will provide a challenge to concepts of the supplementary nature of representation and the original plenitude; and examine the aspects of representation which are erased in the derivation of the signified's origin.

The differential presence of Saussure's signified is identified through its difference from the surrounding signifieds, and in its comprising part of the chain of signifieds, where its identity is deferred through the differential chain. Deferral does not occur in relation to a primary presence; rather, deferral is at the "origin" of the presence, so the sign is not a secondary phenomenon. Derrida terms the dynamic of constitution and division *spacing* (1982a, 13), and explains that it allows the formulation of presence as

something in its own right only to show that each presence represents the exclusion of numerous other presences from its "independent" presence, and each is divided between representing itself and representing the absence of what it excludes from its own identity. *Spacing* undermines the assumptions derived from the binary model of presence and absence, and divides "all that is thought on the basis of presence" (1982a, 13), such as the presence which isolates consciousness in the cogito.

1.4.1. *The Temporal Presence*

The signified presence provides the basis on which the concept of time as that which is outside the present is founded. The representation which elides its own mediation in the temporal aspect of its production, such as mainstream cinema, utilises the continuous production of signifieds to achieve the elision by emulating the production of meaning in speech. The letter is exteriorised because it forms a remainder outside the origin of its inscription, and the origin of its inscription is a by-product of the signified itself, produced in the context of the present. The "now" of the present is the transcendental form of presence which exteriorises temporality, and which is labelled as the form of presence which becomes past, while retaining the singularity of its event. For example, the signature marks and retains the signer's "having-been present in a past now, which will remain a future now, and therefore in a now in general, in the transcendental form of nowness" (Derrida 1982a, 328).

The temporal nature of the photograph may be related to the motion picture as the letter is to the phoneme, yet the authenticity of the photographic signified is generally not questioned in the manner to which the letter is subjected. The purity of the photograph is derived from the analogical nature of the recording which elides the production of the recorded instant, so the image is accepted to mediate a past "now," but the authenticity of the self-contained, single inscribed moment is not challenged. The derivation of classical models of representation may be traced to the following description of the privileging of the voice, and the notion of consciousness as presence present to itself in speech. The privileging of the voice is complicit not only with the thinking of time on the basis of the present, but also the notion of truth as that which may be unveiled, as in the "pure"

experience of presence in the veiling signifier.

The distribution of temporality around the conception of the present is an effect of *spacing*, which Derrida labels as the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space (1982a, 8); and in the phonetic chain, where the distribution of phonemes is continuous but also discontinuous as a series of individual presences, the separation of each phoneme by space and time is possible through space and time being divided by each other. The representation of time in the graphic signifier is the blank dividing each letter from the other, and the inaudible distinction between acoustic signifiers is the temporal form of the spacing of the graphic elements on the page; therefore, "the pure phonic chain, to the extent that it implies differences, is itself not a pure continuum or flow of time" (Derrida 1978, 219), which requires time to be thought "differently." Representation gains its temporal inscription from the presence that constitutes the signified differentially, rather than in the closure of pure presence.

The temporality of the cinematic event provides the site from which to refute the self-presence of the represented presence, through intervention in the production of the signified's origin. The cinematic representation, like that of the voice, is present within the moment of its production, however, cinema, being visual and aural, may represent distinct origins for the signified presence because the origin of production cannot be traced back through the voice to the subject's conscious presence. The example presented in the film section to demonstrate this claim comes from *Desperately Seeking Susan*, in which the visual representation of Madonna as the character Susan conflicts with the acoustic representation of Madonna as Madonna in the song, "Into the Groove." The non-simple signified in the present origin of production, in the context of *Desperately Seeking Susan*, allows the traditional erasure of mediation in film, through the analogical recording of the signified, to be called into question.

Signification is the effect when the signified, isolated by Western philosophy as an independent presence, is internally divided by the absence which it exteriorises by defining its autonomy. The classical concept of presence persists in general thought, both because the material presence of the signifier provides a site which paradoxically

hides *différance* by displaying the result of its effect in material form, and because the letter, the signifier most subject to the question of temporality, is repressed. The letter, capable of sustaining its presence in past, present and future, is categorised as a derivative of the fleeting, almost atemporal form of the spoken phoneme, because the presence of the speaking subject is guaranteed by the utterance's immediacy, so the written letter is exteriorised to maintain the purity of the phoneme. Derrida explains that the form of the sign is perceived only when veiled, in the erasure of the absence dividing the presence of the signified, and that the present in which the signified is grasped is the *trace* that permits the sign to be presented but which is "never as it is in the presentation of itself" (1982a, 23).

1.4.2. *The General Scene of Writing*

Derrida illustrates the internal division which the temporal sign hides, by presenting "writing under erasure," formulated by Heidegger, as the first writing: "it is effaced while still remaining legible, is destroyed while making visible the very idea of the sign" (1976, 23). The material signifier, waiting "to be deciphered otherwise" (Derrida 1982a, 24), is hierarchised and the voice appropriated as transparent medium, while the letter is afflicted with the stigma of secondary mediation. Western philosophy, in its platonist tradition, perceives thought and writing as opposing elements in a nature/culture division, respectively. The distrust of the "exteriority of writing in general" tarnishes the spoken word through its association with the temporal and mechanical textual inscription, and Plato's attempt to separate the pure, internal thought of the subject from the external, "literal" writing by labeling it "metaphorical" brings the two closer together, maintaining the exterior sense for the definition of the interior sense (Derrida 1976, 14-15). To ensure itself an avenue of pure communication, Western philosophy recognises within the spoken sign a spontaneity, maintaining the proximity between signified and thought, and therefore freeing the voice from the mediation of the signifier outside its own inception. *Of Grammatology* shows that there is no linguistic sign not already formed from the possibility of its occurrence in graphic form, and in demonstrating this the interior/exterior opposition of literal to metaphorical (thought) writing is refuted, leading

Derrida to challenge the identity of self, in the cogito, based on the subject beholding its own signified.

1.4.3. *The Context of Consciousness*

Drawing on Heidegger's observation that Being is constituted within the conceptual framework of presence, Derrida finds that the definition of consciousness as the "perception of self in presence" (1982a, 16) implies that the concept of consciousness is held under the closure of the present. Since self-presence is grasped in the presence of the signified, hiding *différance* which defeats the concept of the independent presence, the subject's essence is intrinsically founded on the presence divided by the difference and deferral of the signifying chain. The absolute self-presence of Descartes' cogito is simply a presence confirming the self-effacing trace of *différance* manifested in the signified present. The essence within the subject is manifested as the presence of the signified, and since Saussure demonstrates that "language is not a function of the speaking subject" (1959, 37), the essence is thereby determined through the erasure of the mediation of the sign. The relationship between Being and presence is one in which the site of mediation is indeterminable, since each cannot be determined from outside the context of the other. The effect of the indeterminacy is not simply accidental, Derrida concludes. Rather, it is the effect of the veiling of the trace of *différance*, and in the following sections the metaphysical implications of the veiling are examined in various theories of representation; not in order to move outside the closure of presence, but to demonstrate that "*différance* remains a metaphysical name, and all the names that it receives in our language are still, as names, metaphysical" (Derrida 1982a, 26).

1.5. The Closure of Representation

Saussure demonstrates that signification is produced in the differential signifying chain, but his analysis erases the full context of representation. The limitation of an individual form of representation to a theoretically determined context subjects the signified to the closure of truth, in the belief that an ultimate and interior meaning may be found. Saussure attributes signification to the force of pure phonetic speech, effecting closure in

the term *phonetic*, from which the letter is separated; and erased from the dynamics of the system, the letter is then recalled as a descriptive supplement in the textual representation of the differential phoneme. Derrida cites the supplementary position of the letter in Saussure as a demonstration that closure always has a remainder; and he notes in general that the remainder may be used as the site from which to challenge the notion of the closed, autonomous entity.

The binary model of presence and absence, as opposite and independent categories, is based on closure, which Derrida challenges for its erasure of the interdependence of each category. Saussure creates binary closure when describing the signified as the presence of meaning in the sign; he posits an arbitrary and differential system of signification, although he maintains that the process of signification is closed, and that the signified is itself a complete meaning. He develops this model on the premise that the phoneme is the force which initially allows signification to occur, because voice and thought are traditionally thought as co-present; this model of thought only recognises conscious intention and ignores the role of the unconscious. Derrida's formulation of *spacing* ruptures the closure of binary opposition, and the closure of the signified in the self-evidence of the voice is challenged through an appeal to the function, in communication, of the remainder, the letter. Derrida notes that writing is made secondary because its material form does not allow the context in which it signifies to be controlled, yet for language to function it must be capable of re-iteration outside the context of the thought of the individual using the language. For writing to be what it is, it "must be able to function in the radical absence of every empirically determined addressee in general" (Derrida 1982a, 315). The privileging of the voice is the privileging of a particular context of signification, and thereby establishes the autonomy of the signified, which is stabilised by the context of its signification.

The written text has no closed context, other than that of "the already written," and Derrida extends the concept of Writing to include all systems of signification which present the effect of *différance*. Although the signified is subject to context, context is infinitely indeterminate; so the authoritative interpretation of textual signifieds is

undermined. All forms of categorisation effect closure, such as: author, date, title, and in the case of marketable items, the work's status as authentic original or reproduction. The simple definition of a field of enquiry, by genre or the "literary" for example, determines the interpretative process and the acceptable conclusions. Cultural beliefs regarding signification privilege certain types of production and origin, in an attempt to justify the meaning that the text is claimed to represent; the following section examines the nature of the restrictions that are produced.

1.5.1. *Form and Force*

The explication of the text by literary critics often seeks to differentiate a locus of meaning from the remainder of the work. Derrida's argument against the common distinction between form and meaning cites the derivation of each from the other, and this provides the basis for his examination of closure in the structuralist concept of the book. He concludes that the book is not the representation of a meaning anterior to its being written, because "meaning must await being written in order to inhabit itself, and in order to become, by differing from itself, what it is: meaning" (Derrida 1978, 11). Derrida states that pure structure does not exist, except as the fundamental totality which opens and overflows itself, "such that it *takes on meaning* by anticipating a *telos* which here must be understood in its most indeterminate form" (1978, 26). The totality takes on meaning by effacing itself, as *différance* is effaced by the trace of the signified, and the effacement results in the spatialisation of meaning, which "risks enclosing progression toward the future - becoming - by giving it form" (Derrida 1978, 26). The entry of meaning into the text is irreversible, in that it cannot be extracted in summary form as some "absolute simultaneity or instantaneousness. This is why there is no *space* of the work, if by space we mean *presence* or *synopsis* " (Derrida 1978, 14). Therefore, there is no possibility that desire outside the work can be presented as the summary force motivating an enclosed progression of the work. The text, however, appears to take on the requirement of such an explanation, since the totality of the system of writing is effaced, and replaced by the total form of the work. That is, "force is the other of language without which language would not be what it is" (Derrida 1978, 27). In the

cinema, the total form of the work is displaced by the instantaneousness of the projection, and the progression toward meaning is elided by the apparent forward progression of time in the continuum of the projection. The space of the motion picture is erased as the "pure" presence of meaning, which presents "presence" in meaning, derived from the privileging of speech, as the ultimate reference point.

1.5.2. *The Authorial Presence*

The closure of signified meaning, provided by the claimed proximity of voice to thought, extends to the realms outside the spoken signifier, in the form of socially ascribed authority; for example, the patriarchal authority over the family, and the stability of meaning in the literary text and art work conveyed by the legitimating authorial presence. The cultural elevation of feminine reproduction requires the artistic production of the male author to formulate a relationship with the act of production from the feminine position. The solution in Western culture is the exclusion of women from the scene of artistic production, and the elevation of their role into the idealistic figure of the muse.

Active participation in patriarchal culture is possible only for those legitimated by the terms of the closed symbolic activity, which excludes the natural but privileges the purified, cultural Nature. The feminine connotation of creativity, arising from the mother's reproductive capacity, threatens the autonomy of the perpetuation of patriarchal rule so it is repressed, and creativity is appropriated by the male artist; the maternal role in creation is displaced and transcendentalised in the form of the muse, thereby confirming the artist's masculine identity and fragmenting the identity of "the woman." Women are exteriorised from the privilege given to Nature and their relation to it is categorised as passive, implying that they merely bear the child of the father; the feminine identity within patriarchal representation of "the woman" is fragmented as aspects are appropriated for male culture, and different features of femininity are valued differently: the representation of the female body as signifier of sexuality is rendered incompatible with the female body as site of childbirth. The nature/culture division places the maternal link with the child in a position superior to the paternal, and the father has no certainty that his presence has been transferred into the identity of the child. Consequently, the maternal role is devalued

and the transcendental legitimation of the Law is introduced into the family situation, where only the father's name is handed down and the mother's presence is erased from the child's cultural identity.

The prescription of the muse's feminine identity excludes women writers from the pursuit of artistic truth since they cannot participate in an economy of the sign which situates the truth's alterity in femininity; the woman writer cannot hold the feminine outside herself as something other, without erasing her own identity. The historical exclusion of the woman writer from literary production is detailed by Gilbert and Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, where they also examine the ideological belief that creativity is essentially masculine. They find the paternal creator has a theological parallel, where the author "fathers" the text and "in the image of the Divine Creator he becomes the Author - the sole origin and meaning of his work" (Moi 1985, 57). Gilbert and Gubar's observations on Nineteenth Century literary ideology are significant, but Moi finds that they unify the ideological position and response from women writers of the time to an unacceptable extent, where they essentialise the woman writer until they have established the feminine authorship in parallel with the model of masculine presence which they criticise. Their observations on the transcendentalism associated with the author would have been more effectively associated, Moi argues, with the analysis of writing found in Barthes's "The Death of the Author." When they find the author encoded and essentially present as the Madwoman or other socially exteriorised character in the texts under analysis, Gilbert and Gubar close off the potential signifieds, and leave only that determined by authorship; detailing their mistake, Moi writes that it is not merely the patriarchal ideology which should be rejected, "it is equally necessary to reject the *critical practice* it leads to, a critical practice that relies on the author as the transcendental signified of his or her text" (1985, 62).

The authenticity given to the text or art work through its having an author establishes the text's signified by erasing the identity of the text and attributing the meaning to the presence of the author. The anti-theological text, as Barthes would term it, challenges the certainty of representation by eliminating the closure produced by the presence of the

author. The text for Barthes is *writing* rather than literature (1977, 147), and should be acknowledged in terms of the veiled nature of the sign; Barthes explains the meaning of the text as a dynamic, in terms similar to Derrida's description of the first (erased) writing: "writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning" (Barthes, *ibid.*). However, Barthes's definition of writing is more limited than Derrida's, as my section on *S/Z* concludes, since he situates the "evaporation of meaning" with the reader while maintaining that the text is inherently meaningful, whereas Derrida poses a more radical barrier to meaning by stating that the context of writing as an act of communication must also be challenged. Barthes's description of the *systematic* exemption of meaning is the point at which he diverges from Derrida, who extends the context of meaning beyond the system of the text, which is Barthes's contextualisation of meaning.

The extent of the author's implicit control over the interpretation of the work is discussed in "What is an Author?" by Foucault, who notes that the restriction of the author is effected in the conceptualisation of "the work" as a systematic unit (1977, 118). Foucault shows that the author governs the context of representation beyond the subjective presence ascribed to the artistic and literary text's author-creator, because the proper name of the author is used to represent authority over subject matter, and in some cases to establish a discourse which had no previous closure; that is, the author may produce "the possibility and the rules of the formation of other texts" (1977, 131). The representation of the discursive rules in the text occurs through the repetition of analogies and differences, Foucault claims; and the closure that these provide, in the definition of the discourse, also provides the textual structure which Derrida cites as revelation of the rules's dependence on the representation which conveys them, and the impossibility that the discursive work may convey meaning which transcends mediation. That is, the text as origin of the discourse is effectively the remainder of the discourse, and is not the primary source of meaning: Foucault's comment, that the return to the origin is "an effective and necessary means of transforming discursive practice" (1977, 135), implies that the text is not part of its own discursive context, so the specification of the site of

origin is secondary to the origination of the discourse which forms the identity of the text.

1.6. Appropriation and the Artistic Signified

Authorial identity is challenged in the practice of some contemporary visual artists, who appropriate the legitimated, original works of others to challenge the certainty of the original and the control of the author/artist over the use and interpretation of the work. The critical impact of these works is on the traditional closure of the author, the canon, and the implication of masculine subjectivity pursuing a feminine object, artistic truth. The definition of photography as art is challenged, along with the broad cultural closure of the context in which the "artistic" work may be presented. The resources from which an artwork may be produced, and the elements of the work which allow the artistic presence to be traced are revealed as aspects of closure, which erase the signifier and replace it with the authorial presence. The resistance to the traditional forms of closure is a direct challenge to the ownership of the signified through appropriation, either of style or the traditional work as a whole. The evidence of mediation between the author and the work is shown to have an important influence on critical acceptance of the validity of the work as art; not because considerations of style are involved, but because it effects authorial closure.

In order to maintain a critical stance, the appropriation must be effected as a comment on the institutional framework within which it takes place. Godeau (1987) maintains the centrality of this hypothesis in her analysis of appropriation in photographic work, and she uses it to distinguish critical appropriation, which challenges authorial or artistic norms, from that which applies appropriation as a stylistic technique in an institutionalised fashion. One of those she examines is Sherrie Levine, whose work has relevance to questions about the status of the author and the original because she rephotographs existing reproductions of works by "canonised masters of photographic modernism;" she selects the works for the ideological density in their treatment of topics such as the classical nude, the beauty of nature, and the Depression poor (Godeau 1987, 6). Levine does not retitle, reframe or mediate in any way other than rephotographing the

appropriated work, a practice which leads her work to be regarded as fraudulent, both by those who own the originals, and those who see her work as a challenge to the integrity of the original photograph, because her work is not original as a piece of art and threatens the cultural value of art photography and authorial canonicity. The practice of photographic appropriation is relatively common, and has given rise to cyclical appropriation maintaining the status quo, such as when the advertising tableau, having been appropriated by art photography, is reappropriated by advertising as a legitimated form, which arises from the initial appropriative activity being uncritical of its institutional framework; as Godeau points out, "critical practices not specifically calibrated to resist recuperation as aesthetic commodities almost inevitably succumb to this process" (1987, 16). Levine's non-interventionist appropriation resists reappropriation because all such practice challenges the original creating identity. An example of work which appropriates tableaux and resists their reappropriation is that of Cindy Sherman, whose photography is critical both of the presence of the artist in the work, and the images of women in Hollywood B-grade films. She recreates black and white film stills, and dressing as a typical character she explicitly presents her artistic presence in the form of the fictional presence: the conventional category of the character reveals the artistic presence "to be both fictional and absent" (Godeau 1987, 16). Criticism that Sherman maintains the objectified feminine image may be dispelled by noting that the dispersal of the authorial presence undermines the validity of the image's signified, and indicates the process of the entry of the signified into the structure of the representation, rather than presenting the signified as a truth, realised through artistic subjectivity.

1.7. The Nature of Representation: Conclusions

Representation is traditionally modelled on the production of meaning in a privileged context, that is, the theoretical proximity of the signified of the utterance to the thought of the speaking subject. The spoken signifier is privileged as a non-mediating medium, and the conceptualisation of all other forms of representation and meaning derive from the presence of origin in speech. The supplementary nature of representation requires a

closed context for its signified to be guaranteed in the absence of the origin, an origin produced by the erasure of language in the enunciation in favour of the self-presence of the subject. The binary opposition provides a general basis from which the speech/writing division extends into different cultural areas, and the authorial closure over the text incorporates a male/female division, derived from the patriarchal nature of Western culture. Saussure's model of the differential signified is extended by Derrida into the demonstration that all signification is differential, from which he posits a general *Writing*, to explain the signified's origin in the trace of *différance*, rather than the subject. The effacement of *différance* allows the signified to appear as an independent entity, and the closure of origin is also manifested in the closure of form, where meaning and the manner of its signification are critically constructed as related but independent phenomena.

The privileged erasure of mediation in the utterance allows other forms of representation which present minimal evidence of mediation to be inscribed with the metaphysics of originary presence in the production of the signified. The following sections pursue the relationship of temporality to the production of the signified, with the conclusion that the "present" of the inscription is produced by the inscription, rather than represented through it. Photography and cinema are the forms of representation which are most affected by theory concerning the production of the signified, since their analogical recording aligns them with the non-mediation of the voice.

The privileging of masculine representational activity situates women in an exterior realm, and the representation of "the feminine" is subject to the erasure and veiling effect which Derrida notes is the condition for truth. The Lacanian representation of desire is examined from this perspective, in the following section. The examples of work by Sherman and Levine resist the traditional erasure of mediation in the representation of the feminine "essence." The subjectively realised truth of the feminine is problematic, since the origin of their work is displaced through appropriation or the object is also the artistic subject. The signification is therefore placed in a general context of representation, and detached from privileged closures of meaning.

2

Representation in Lacanian Psychoanalysis

2.1. *Introduction*

Lacan observes that the subject's reality is mediated by the realm of language, clearly separating the sign from the "originary" referent. However, the object of desire in Lacan's textual discourse is presented as naturally and transparently "the woman," placing the subject's relation to the object of desire, the phallus, in correspondence with the possession of the penis. Lacan's text may therefore be investigated for the ellipsis of the mediation of language. The model of the linguistic sign which Lacan advances is innovative; however, it is also phonocentric, which results in the erasure of the general scene of Writing proposed by Derrida, and the introduction of the notion of full presence in the word.

The theoretical apparatus Lacan brings to bear on his description of the dialectic of desire opens up a representational structure in language different from that posited by classical semiotics. The feature common to classical representation and desire is the absent entity. For Lacan however, the sign's function in desire is independent of the missing referent. The absent object is important in Lacan, where it causes the subject's irreversible entry into language, and structures all signification in a topology of lack. This "topology of castration" (Derrida 1982a, 6) is identical to the system based on presence (in Western metaphysics), since it governs discourse as a transcendental identity, structuring each signifier. The following discussion of Lacan examines the representation of desire in language, and develops the concepts, considered in following sections, as they are applied in contemporary textual analysis, such as Barthes's description of myth.

2.1.1. *Desire in the Lacanian Subject*

Wilden notes that Lacanian desire is a psychoanalytical recasting of the Hegelian notion that human desire is directed at recognition, and requires mediation by language in its

transmission between subjects, so the object of desire becomes that which mediates any relationship with another (Lacan 1968, 163). Lacan further states that the subject's desire is directed at a locus, the Other, from which the medium of language immediately returns the subject's own message in an inverted form. The signifier represents desire, but is not the object of desire itself, since the sign is incorporated in a differential system. The deferral of signification through the signifying chain may be temporarily interrupted by the structural closure of the sentence, which is not a permanent closure, and may occur in a textual reproduction, suggesting that the Lacanian model of desire may be used to explain the structure of narrative representation.

2.2. The Subject of the Enunciation

The conscious is traditionally perceived as a central, self-present entity, because the utterance appears to provide self-referential signification through the personal pronoun, "I." Lacan's analysis, which derives from Freud, states that the singular "I" of the utterance does not represent the interior nature of the decentred subject. The Lacanian subject is discontinuous, has no central essence and presents a continuous identity only through the projection of the "I," which is merely a locus in the sentence conveying it. The shifter, "I," refers to its object through convention, but because it designates the person who utters it, "it can only refer existentially to the utterance" (Barthes 1967, 22). The speech act may be divided between the utterance (the actual words spoken) and the enunciation (the act of speaking); from these terms, the apprehension of the self in the cogito makes the assumption that there is no distinction between the subject of the utterance and the subject of the enunciation. Freud challenges the full presence of the conscious identity, which the cogito seeks to confirm, by showing, in the analysis of dreams, jokes and speech errors, that it is not privileged over the Unconscious. Lacan argues against privileging the conscious in speech (as in the cogito) because the subject of the utterance is displaced from the conscious subject which brings the enunciation into being. For Lacan, the "I" of the utterance designates the subject of the enunciation "but does not signify it" (1977, 298), and the transient subject of the Symbolic passes through

the signifier but is not present in it. The signifier designates the locus of the Other, which occupies the site held by the subject prior to its retroactive constitution. The code of the utterance is determined only with the completion of its final term, and the signification is structured by the *points de capiton* which are points where the signifier is anchored to the signified. However, Lacan maintains the primacy of the spoken word in his theory of the subject's constitution by language, which confines his refutation of self-presence within the boundaries of phonocentrism.

2.2.1. *The Entry into Language*

The infant Lacanian subject constitutes an amorphous plenitude, and makes no distinction between "self" and the surrounding environment. In the satisfaction of its demand for food, the infant may recognise the breast as the partial object which it perceives as part of its own plenitude; then in weaning, the child may realise a lack in its own plenitude, and striving to regain this loss, the child will enter the Symbolic and express its desire for the restoration of unity through the signifying chain. Augmenting the importance of Freud's discovery that in his grandson's *Fort! Da!* game the child is attempting to control the presence and absence of an object, Lacan shows that the child's identification of the object external to itself is the identification of itself in an objectified form. The subject's representation of the *objet a* is the return of its own identity, and similarly, the locus of the Other is an objectification of the subject's identity which returns, in an inverted form, the message of desire sent by the subject. Lacan states that the Other is therefore the locus from which the question of the subject's existence may be put (1968, 108), and the form of the question is best understood, according to the graph of the subversion of the subject, as *Che vuoi?* "What do you want of me?" which is the inverted form of the subject's own message "What does he(*sic*) want of me?" (1977, 335). The subject's desire for the Other returns as the Other's desire for the subject, so the desire for recognition is misrecognised as the Other's desire for recognition: the subject's alienation in the Other transforms its recognition into *méconnaissance* and does not allow its own desire to be answered directly.

The Symbolic is the realm confining the subject once it leaves the pre-linguistic and

pre-Oedipal Imaginary, which is never abandoned fully, and remains in association with the Symbolic. The Symbolic structures the Imaginary and the Real, so the Real is what is real for the subject as experienced through the Symbolic. The subject initially encounters the phallus in the Imaginary when it realises the lack that arises through the withdrawal of the mother's immediate satisfaction of need and demand. The Symbolic contains the social law which structures the subject's family relationship, although not necessarily through the involvement of family members. The law is first expressed in the Oedipal relationship, where the interaction mother-child-phallus is changed through the presence of the Symbolic father, which "inserts the lack of object into a new dialectic" (Lacan 1968, 186). The social concepts learned by the subject are represented in the Symbolic, where they structure the dialectical expression of desire in the signifier.

2.2.2. *The Gaze*

The return of desire in the utterance may be illustrated by the return of the gaze, which the subject imagines in the field of the Other (Lacan 1979, 84). When consciously directing its gaze at an object, the subject is aware of sending the gaze until the object is recognised, at which point the gaze disappears and the object presents itself to vision (Lacan 1979, 89). The object itself has no meaning, and the recognition of the object requires the subject's misrecognition of its own identity, which has been split in order to accommodate the world (Lacan 1979, 106). This split allows the subject to perceive itself in its perceptions, so that all perceptual representations belong to the subject and are part of its formation (Lacan 1979, 81). The subject's environment appears as spectacle, which is there to be seen and which is all-seeing, so the subject's representations gain an independence which allows them to control the central field of vision, in which desire displaces reality as marginal. The disappearance of the gaze is the moment of idealisation when the subject identifies itself in the object; and in the utterance, at the moment when the desire is identified, the subject has been subverted and the statement is no longer external to it.

2.3. Representation and the Symbolic

Lacan uses the classical definition of representation, and notes that the metaphysical issues of representation are of no relevance to the subject (1979, 106), but the issues of representation are of relevance in the Lacanian text itself. However, the type of representation which occurs in the Symbolic does not adhere to the classical representative structure, and may provide a basis from which to criticise the classical model and to advocate the functioning of a different form. The dialectic of desire is possible only if the representation of desire in the signifying chain is independent and actively signifying with a force derived from its own structure; if the signifiers merely formed a passive representation of desire active elsewhere, the subject could undergo no relocation. In Lacan's theoretical formulation, the representation of desire in the signifying chain reveals the absence of a simple origin, because the sending out of the representation is also a sending back that involves discontinuity in the transmission and reception of the message. The signifier represents desire that is discontinuous with the subject since it returns as the discourse of the Other; and the Symbolic may also project the desire sent by another subject (the castrated Other, whose discourse reveals that its site is also one of lack) or the idealised Other of the Imaginary representation.

"The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis" stresses the reality of the word, and a footnote referring to Freud's observations on repetition in the re-experiencing of a trauma reads: the subject is "reproducing it tangibly, as though it were actually happening, instead of remembering it" (Lacan 1968, 17n.43). Elsewhere, Lacan states that "repetition is not reproduction" (1979, 50), meaning that the act is symbolic and should not be analysed in terms of the existence of objects in the Real, and this may be interpreted as a challenge to the notion of origin, and the original encounter with the Real. Derrida's examination of the Freudian concept of the memory trace, which is inscribed after the breaching of the initial resistance to the stimulus offered by the psychical neuron (where a temporal onset and termination is implicit), leads him to "maintain that in the *first time* of the contact between *two* forces, repetition has begun" (1978, 202). Subsequent repetitions are the rebreachings of the pathways of the memory imprint, and

this process cannot distinguish between an original and repeated breaching, which elides the difference between origin and repetition; this therefore eliminates the concept of the origin and designates all memory traces as (original) repetitions.

In the phenomenon of repetition, Lacan finds the "birth of Truth in the word," and then immediately evokes "the reality of what is neither true nor false" (1979, 17). All utterances are received by the subject at the same level of expression because there is no possibility of metalanguage, since "any statement of authority has no other guarantee than its very enunciation, and it is pointless for it to seek it in another signifier, which could not appear outside this locus in any way" (Lacan 1977, 310). The locus of the enunciation is the spoken word, and Lacan bases the context of the code in the metonymic signifying chain, on the basis that it signifies truth, when the notion of truth is itself derived from the signification. The veiling of truth in the word privileges the spoken utterance, because Lacan finds the utterance committed to the communication of truth, "even if it is intended to deceive" (1977, 43). Derrida replies to this statement by noting that "what is neither true nor false is reality. But as soon as speech is inaugurated, one is in the register of the unveiling of truth" (1987a, 469-70), and the written text is therefore treated as a derivative of the spoken enunciation. The "pure" manifestation of desire requires the utterance to be assessed as a transparent medium, and the realm of speech maintains its function at the expense of other forms of Symbolic representation. Lacan's seminar on the effect of the "letter" in Poe's "The Purloined Letter" attempts to demonstrate the literary context of the truth in speech, which Derrida, in "Le Facteur de la Vérité" (1987a), takes as an implicit acknowledgement that the voice is merely privileged in the context of Lacan's theory, since the textual frame in which it is inscribed is not accounted for in the movement of the signifier and the unveiling of its truth. Lacan refrains from theorising a general Symbolic system of representation, which would not subordinate the graphic inscription to the order of desire expressed in the utterance, and he maintains the classical orientation toward the referent, for although he grants supremacy to the signifier, his theoretical work does not acknowledge the context through which the phonetic signifier is represented by the "supplement" of writing.

2.3.1. *The Points de Capiton and Meaning*

Lacan states that the signification of the utterance is closed by the *points de capiton*, for the *glissement* of the signifier would otherwise render speech meaningless. After the last term of the utterance, the *points de capiton* retroactively structure the utterance, and Wilden notes that their command over meaning represents their "'reference back' to a symbolic function" (Lacan 1968, 273). The closure effected by the *points* may therefore be traced to an originary force, which results in the meaning of the utterance being ascribed to the closure of a totalising structure. That is, the notion that the *points* structure meaning by representing a primary signifier suggests that Lacan's Symbolic is subjected to a transcendentalising closure. The structure of referral which Lacan states as the stabilising force of meaning is in Derrida's opinion an idealisation of the "structural effect of *signification* in general" (Derrida 1987a, 464). The *points* in the signifying chain, which interrupt the *glissement*, represent signification itself, rather than effecting representation through the anchoring to the "central" lack of the phallus, Derrida believes.

The message arises from the diachronic structuration of the sentence by the *points*, however, the synchronic structure is "more hidden" (hence, the complicity of phonocentrism and veil), and "it is this structure which takes us to the source" (Lacan, 1977, 303). The phallus is implied as the source, as Lacan makes clear by noting that in describing the utterance, "one can speak of code only if it is already the code of the Other" (1977, 305). So, the metonymic deferral of desire along the signifying chain signifies the desire of the Other, yet Lacan insists on placing the signifier of lack outside the sentence, where it acts as the source of meaning. The context of the utterance is closed not by the diachronic effect of the *points de capiton*, in which case, but by the originary context of the phallus, as signifier of lack. The *glissement* of the signifier, which Lacan shows is necessary for signification, is lost in the sentence and replaced with the signification of lack by privileged signifiers, Lacan claims. Derrida states that the signification is itself the proof that there is no originary presence (or absence) deferred through the sign, and that Lacan is displacing the lack in the Symbolic into the centrist topology of castration, in order to posit an underlying, truthful communication.

The function of the *points de capiton*, in differentiating the message from the communication, is demonstrated in Lacan's appeal to the validity of the statement, "I am lying." The enunciation manifested in the statement is an "I am deceiving you," given by Lacan as the deception which allows the analyst in return to formulate, "You are telling the truth," as a response which does not mediate and replies with the subject's own enunciation (1979, 139-40). The "am lying" is a signifier, the first of the *points de capiton*, which retroactively determines the second as the signification of the "I" (Lacan 1979, 139). The true signification, Lacan believes, is determined in the closure of the "am lying" as a spoken signifier, and the question of signification in the written text may be resolved only if the text is secondary to the utterance. The statement contains a message which is other than the communication of the utterance, and which Lacan displaces into speech as the veiling which constitutes it as truth. The truth which the subject speaks in the example is displaced out of the locus of the signifier and situated in the communication with a listening Other. Derrida shows that the signification in the medium of language requires the "absence" of the sender and receiver from the scene of representation, and implies that the term *communication* is problematic. So, the "truth" in the utterance is an effect of the spatial form of meaning being theorised as something exterior to meaning, and that form provides the motif of the veil.

The necessity of the *points*, which Derrida places in a non-originary position, results from Lacan's privileging of the spoken utterance. Derrida's observations concerning the "pure" temporal flow of speech may be critically applied to the description of the *points*. Lacan holds that the *points* are heterogeneous: one is "a locus (a place, rather than a space)," while the other is "a moment (a rhythm, rather than a duration)" (1977, 304). The moment of the second *point*, which is the punctuation of complete signification, is itself produced as *point* by the signification. The "pure" presence of the *point* is merely the result of *spacing*, and is an effect of closure in signification, as the "presence" of the signified, rather than the precursor to meaning. The diachronic closure of the punctuation is complicit with the Lacanian notion of truth in the spoken word, from which the mediation of the Symbolic is elided by the testament of speech as communication, and

desire for the Other. Without the stated temporal linearity of the utterance, the *points* would not appear to originate in the signification, and their existence is Lacan's constitution of the phallus as that which is veiled, by specifying the structure of the sentence as the message which veils the truth of the communication. The mediation of the Symbolic in the dialectic of desire is elided, because the formula for human language (the returning of the sender's message in inverted form) places the phallus as the central point in the subject's communication.

2.3.2. *The Representation of the Phallus*

Lacan states that the phallus is the signifier of signifiers, and that it governs the signifying chain, in which there is instability in the relationship of signifier to signified. The Saussurian sign is a stable unit, in which the signifier and signified, unified by the bond between them, relate to each other as the two sides of a leaf of paper. Lacan radically revises the nature of the sign, and destroys its unity by granting the signifier sovereign position over the signified, since the signified may function as signifier of another signified. Lacan breaks the bond, symbolised by the bar (/) in Saussure's diagram (S/s), and revalues the bar as that which resists signification. The lack of stability in the sign allows the slippage (*glissement*) of the signifier over the signified, causing signification to be guaranteed only in the context of the utterance. Lacan emphasises the bar to signification and the lack of cohesion between the ranks of signifier and signified in his description of the Symbolic, yet he maintains the stability of the signifier of signifiers, the phallus. The phallus functions both in the Imaginary, as an object, and in the Symbolic, where it is represented as that which "cannot enter the domain of the signifier without being *barred* from it, that is to say, covered over by castration" (1968, 187). The transcendental signification of the phallus as signifier of signifiers is a contradiction of the terms which Lacan insists are necessary for signification, such as the irreducible movement of metonymy along the chain of signifiers. Wilden finds no adequate structural explanation of the phallus's transcendence in the Symbolic after it arises as an Imaginary object, and he suggests the "difficulty derives from the way that Imaginary elements may enter the Symbolic ... [and] ... from the way that symbolic elements may

be reduced to Imaginary functions" (Lacan 1968, 186).

Derrida criticises Lacan for his representation of the phallus in the voice, since he perceives this as phonocentrism. In Lacan's protest against the possibility of metalanguage, Derrida finds the phallus ideally conceived as that which is fully present in itself, and indivisible in any way. For Derrida, the signified appears when *différance* is erased by the formation of the trace of its erasure, and this allows signification to occur but does not signify *différance* itself. However for Lacan, the disappearance of the phallus in the veiling signifier is the process by which the phallus is signified, and which interrupts the arbitrary and differential structure of the signifying chain. Lacan states that the raising (*Aufhebung*) of any signifiable to the function of signifier is signified by the phallus (1977, 288). This, in Derrida's understanding, is a reversal of the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, which "lifts the sensory signifier into the ideal signified" (1987a, 480). Lacan supposes that the voice, in the utterance, is privileged by the phallus, however, the position of the spoken word in the logos "annuls the reversal" (Derrida 1987a, 480), because raising the phallus into the site which gains its privilege from the logos merely incorporates the phallus into the existing metaphysics.

2.3.3. *The Transparency of the Veil*

Lacan's use of the voice as locus of truth, and signification of the phallus, is an example of "structural complicity between the motifs of the veil and the voice, between the truth and phonocentrism, phallocentrism and logocentrism" (Derrida 1987a, 479). The voice provides the barred signifier which represents the exclusion of the phallus from the Symbolic, and the veiling of the phallus by the spoken signifier is similar to the castration of the biological symbol, where the phallus is not the "organ, penis or clitoris, that it symbolises" (Lacan 1977, 285), yet the delineation of desire between having and not having the phallus results in the penis taking on the privilege of being signifier; hence, the complicity between phallocentrism and phonocentrism. With respect to the phallus, the relations between the sexes "turn around a 'to be' and a 'to have'" (Lacan 1977, 289), and Lacan refines this relationship by specifying that the "to have" is modified by the intervention of a "to seem." This intervention allows the penis to act as the privileged

signifier, and Lacan consequently states that "the woman" "finds the signifier of her own desire in the body of him to whom she addresses her demand for love" (1977, 290). The governing of desire by the penis is evident in what Derrida terms a "determined *situation* ... in which the phallus is the mother's desire to the extent that she does not have it" (1987a, 480). The symbolic relationship between the phallus and the penis is not explicit in the male body because the penis is part of the Real's plenitude in its own right, however, in comparison with the female body, the biological relationship is revealed. The female body is a plenitude in the Real and cannot lack anything, so the Symbolic castration which is ascribed to "the woman" can only arise by situating the phallus in the body of the male by virtue of the penis. The subject only has access to the phallus as signifier in the locus of the Other, so a splitting in the subject results, because the subject must be the phallus for the Other, which is also the locus of the phallus for the subject, and what the subject has "is worth no more than what *he* does not have" (my italics, Lacan 1977, 289). The exchange of desire in the Symbolic is determined by Lacan on the basis of the biological division of the sexes, and the phallus is the privileged signifier in male dominated society because it is associated with the penis.

The biologism which orients the description of sexual desire, and posits the Other as "the woman," connotes femininity in the veiling castration. In the phallogocentric evaluation, the lack of a penis disposes the female body to be characterised as the natural Other; and the code of femininity may also be naturalised at the cultural, Symbolic level through cosmetics and fashion. The cosmetic mask may act as a screen both in the Imaginary, where it is a lure for the gaze and gives the impression of something hidden behind the appearance, and in the Symbolic, where it may have the same veiling effect but is the signifier of the desire to connote the phallus beyond; in the Symbolic, Lacan notes, the subject "knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is a gaze" (1979, 107). Lacan demonstrates the use of the veil in the dual context, which allows it to signify the essence of femininity, in relating: "Such is the woman concealed behind her veil: it is the absence of the penis that turns her into the phallus, the object of desire. Draw attention to this absence in a more precise way by getting her to wear a

pretty wig and fancy dress, and you, or rather she, will have plenty to tell us about" (1977, 322).

The essence of femininity is therefore in the masquerade, which Lacan believes the feminine identity pretends to pretend is a veiling of the phallus in order to signify a desire to be the phallus. The essentially feminine aspect Lacan attributes to the veil's function, that it makes "virile display in the human being seem feminine" (1977, 291), also displays the binarism in his description of gender. For Lacan the feminine poses a contradiction: the displacement it undergoes in the masquerade makes it enigmatic, yet it may be essentialised and represented, since the mask is a transparent signifier, connoting itself as referent, resulting in there being nothing beyond the appearance.

2.4. Decentring the Signifier of Femininity

Visual representations of the female body in fashion photography clearly utilise the economy of femininity connoted through the veil and cosmetic. The photographer Sylvia Kolbowski assembles representations of femininity in cropped and serialised form in order to contrive a "critical reading of the fashion image calculated to rupture the fictions of such representation" (Godeau 1984, 100). The grouping entitled *Model Pleasure II* (1982) consists of images of models veiled by fashion garments and obstacles such as venetian blinds, while in *Model Pleasure part 5* (1983) the focus is on the veil of cosmetics, and the cropped close-ups reveal the similarity of essential facial features and their make-up design; the averted gaze is also readily apparent, and parallels the assumption of the natural spectacle of the female body in Lacan's example, found "in the satisfaction of a woman who knows that she is being looked at, on condition that one does not show her that one knows that she knows" (1979, 75). The images challenge the connotation in Lacan that there is nothing beyond the veil, by presenting reversals of the gaze, showing the "inside" of the appearance. As a result, the screen is emptied of significance and the signified desire for the phallus is shown to arise from the context of the masculine gaze on the feminine object. The application of cosmetics is not contextualised by the masculine gaze in *Desperately Seeking Susan* (detailed in a

following section); so, desire cannot be ascribed to the central position of the phallus in the Symbolic. *Model Pleasure part 5* (1983) includes a photograph of a printing press, possibly to indicate the level of reality to which the images belong. The use of the appropriated image contributes to a shift in the evaluation of the artistic resource from the originary "real" to the already representative, potentially showing that the real is determined by the referral from representation to the source, which is already designated as representative. The Lacanian Real is only determined for the subject as a result of the entry into the Symbolic, so there is no origin for representation which is independently accessible without the mediation of the signifier.

2.5. Representation in Lacanian Psychoanalysis:

Conclusions

The signifier's mediation between the subject and the Other is structured by the central lack of the phallus, although Lacan states that there is no stable relationship between the signifier and the signified. Lacan's claim is complicit with the logocentrism of Western philosophy, since it privileges the spoken word as the locus of meaning, closed by the phallus. The Symbolic realm is shown to mediate in the subject's experience of the Real, so the primary nature of all experience is questioned. The phonocentrism Derrida detects in Lacan's theory reveals the basis from which the "truth" of the word is developed, and the context through which Lacan's representation of the phallus places women in a secondary position. The phallus is defined as that which is veiled, so the veil itself is for Lacan the signifier of desire for the phallus; the biologism of Lacan's theory ascribes the female the position of natural Other, and the cosmetic veil is interpreted by Lacan as the veiling of the already missing penis. There is nothing beyond the veil in that context, so the veil is itself the representation of the veil; the mediation of the Symbolic is elided as the phallus provides the ultimate meaning of the signification of castration.

The centrist origin of Lacan's claims are challenged in the examples of work by Kolbowski which demonstrate that the signifier of the veil is not transparent and that the notion of there being nothing beyond the veil is derived from the closure of the context of

its signification. The veil's screening of the gaze is shown to have an inherently masculine orientation in the claim that it signifies the desire for the phallus/penis, and mediation of the gaze by the Other is elided in Lacan's scenario of the woman's desire to be spectacle.

3

Desire and Code: The Function of Myth in Barthes

3.1. *Introduction*

The translation of Lacanian theory into textual analysis involves the evaluation of the role of the Symbolic and the unconscious within the text, rather than the psychoanalysis of the characters, the author or the reader. The parallel between the subject and the text is found in their both being constituted by language. Barthes's model of the text-as-subject examines the dynamics of textual signification at the level of the reader's recognition of meaning, which creates an overlap in Barthes's explanation of desire in the text, since the desire which Barthes traces between the meaningful codes may also be interpreted as the desire for meaning itself, where "meaning" functions as the objectification of the subject's knowledge in the text.

The function of the code in representation, Barthes believes, is the referral of meaning to the already written, which detaches the representational medium from the referent as originary source, yet the code as an independent structure is not subjected to the dissemination of origin. Therefore, Barthes posits the structuration of the text at the level of the code, eliding the fact that meaning erases itself as structure. The concepts of presence and absence explored in terms of castration are based on the acceptance of unproblematic nature of the presence of meaning, because Barthes elides the letter from the scene of representation, and merely considers code as meaning. Consequently, Barthes's textual analysis of realist narrative maintains a bias toward the spoken communication, and defines realism as representation, privileging the code.

The text presents the interaction of codes which are drawn from the field of public discourse, the *doxa*. The structure of the code represents the anchoring of the utterance by the *points de capiton*. Barthes designates the *doxa* as the contemporary *myth*. The similarity between myth and the Lacanian unconscious is in the imperceptibility of myth

in the text. That is, a signified which is not readily accepted by the reader as the inherent meaning is not accorded the status of myth. The Lacanian unconscious is defined as that "marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood" (Lacan 1977, 50), which is the nature of the meaning, apparently inherent, in the text supporting myth. My examination of the function of myth in Barthes is directed at the relationship between realism and representation, the interaction of meaning and desire in the Symbolic, and the implied heterogeneity of code as meaning and structure. The analysis concentrates on analogical photographic representation (providing a basis for the analysis of cinema in the following chapter) and the realist text; with a focus on the elision of the medium in Barthes's theorisation of the structure of meaning.

3.2. Photographic Representation and Social Codes

Barthes shows the entry of myth into the field of representation by explaining the semiotic concepts of denotation and connotation. The signifier is the denotation, and the connotation is the signified concept, which itself is a signifier of connotation, or myth. The signified connotation occurs within the text or image as a fragment of ideology (Barthes 1967, 91); not the formulated, philosophical ideology of political theory, but the unconsciously assimilated field of public opinion, which is diffuse and specific to each culture. Barthes states that the origin of the code of connotation is "neither artificial (as in a true language) nor natural, but historical" (1977, 22), making it a product of the society in which it is found and thereby allowing the connotation to be naturalised by the denoted message.

Denotation and connotation are conveyed through codes that are socially constructed; however, in the case of photography the former lacks codification, and relies on the plenitude of nature/reality to provide the syntagmatic aspect of the image. A drawing or sketch is always coded through its selectivity and style, but the photograph is a form of analogical reproduction, and this denotative neutrality gives the photograph the nature of a "'flat' anthropological fact" (Barthes 1977, 45). Since the denoted content of the photographic image resists codification, the myth is connoted more effectively, for "it is

the syntagm of the denoted message which 'naturalises' the system of the connoted message" (Barthes 1977, 51). The lack of denotative code allows the connotation to disperse through the whole image, so the message seems to arise from the natural manifestation of the real. However, the absence of code in the denotative level of the photograph, and the absence of disruption to the entry of myth, suggests that Barthes may be fragmenting a phenomenon of signification in order for him to reconstitute the fragments into a unified textual element which is not fundamental to the signification. Barthes states that the signifier of myth is "at the same time meaning and form" (1983, 102), but in the text when myth becomes form the meaning "evaporates, only the letter remains" (1983, 103). The implication which may be drawn from the latter is that there is a pure textual structure which supports the entry and evaporation of meaning.

The photograph, Barthes speculates, must have a "brute" form (1977, 44), to which the aspects of connotation are applied, and implicitly he suggests that the photographic text may be determined as something other than meaning. Connotation is always present in the image, for even the act of pointing a camera at an object allows it to become a signifier supporting a signified. The mechanical aspects of photography "(framing, distance, lighting, focus, speed) all effectively belong to the plane of connotation" (Barthes 1977, 44); so in photography "there is never *art* but always *meaning*" (ibid. 24), because the aesthetic aspects of the photograph connote "Art."

3.2.1. *Barthes's Demonstration Reading*

Barthes selects a photograph from the cover of an issue of *Paris-Match*: "a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolor" (1983, 101); and he demonstrates that the features of the image are not irrevocably unified, by reading the image on three separate levels. Assuming the *Paris-Match* image expresses French imperialism, Barthes finds that, in the literal reading of the signifier, the saluting Negro is an *example* of French imperialism, and is a *symbol* for it (1983, 115). Read solely for the signified, the myth is found imposed on the signifier in the image, and that the signifier, the saluting Negro, is an *alibi* for French imperialism. Since the inscription of the mythical concept in the denotative signifier is a

marketed idea, a major step in decoding the myth is the identification of the particular social group at which the concept is aimed with the expectation of their sympathetic response, that is, natural reading rather than decoding. Finally, reading the myth as a whole, Barthes finds the interaction of the codes establishes the soldier as the very *presence* of French imperialism. The subject's complete acceptance of connoted material in the denotation indicates that the myth has transformed history into Nature, and the mythical image is not perceived by Barthes as a differential representational economy. The *presence* of imperialism is the objectification of the reader's imperialist ideological beliefs in the photographic text, and not the reading of a special type of signifier. The *presence* is not simple and irreducible, but is rather the presence signified by the erasure of the signifier, as in the self-presence determined through the immediacy of the utterance. The objectification of the self in the locus of the Other, in Lacan, results in the Other being the site of lack and desire. Barthes's objectification results in a textual plenitude, which erases the medium of the photograph as the subject's Symbolic message is received in an idealised, non-inverted form. The idealised signification of myth is not possible as Barthes proposes. However, the process of reading for myth demonstrates the absence of inherent meaning in the text.

3.2.2. *The New Space-Time Category*

Barthes's examination of the relationship between the photographic signifier, signified and referent leads him to conclude that the photograph "corresponds to a decisive mutation of informational economies" (1977, 45). The photographic signifier necessarily refers to a real thing, because the photograph could not occur without one, yet the referent can be designated no further than "*having-been-there*" (Barthes 1977, 44). Barthes claims that the distortion of the informational economy of the photograph is found because "the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation" (1981a, 89), yet this allows a "pure" non-expressive structure to provide the base of the photograph from which connotation arises. The concept of authentication implies an element of truth is present in the recording of the originary nature of the referent. So, the differentiation of the concepts of denotation and representation leads to their self-erasing

reconstitution at the originary point of the referent, which produces a misleading definition of authentication as something outside representation. The photograph cannot indicate what it is *that has been*, since the photographic "testimony bears not on the object but on time" (Barthes 1981a, 89). Barthes determines that the photographic representation provides the evidence of "a new space-time category: spatial immediacy and temporal anteriority" (1977, 44). The testimony to the past time of the photograph is problematic in that the past moment itself is not autonomous and is the effect of representation. Derrida demonstrates the effect of the erasure of the signified as presence as that which conditions the thinking of time on the basis of the present. The same situation occurs in Barthes's temporal testimony, which bears on the presence of signification rather than the past present of the recording. As such, the representational economy of the photograph does not derive from the temporal authenticity of the referent but is engaged in the production of the authenticity. The photograph's authentication is re-iterable, as is the authentication of the signature, and the photograph may be likened to an analogical signature, but not to a temporal signature, since the temporality is secondary to the presence of the signified. As Derrida notes, the signature, in order to function, "must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production" (1982a, 328). When the testimony of the photograph is compared with the testimony of other photographs, the sameness of the testimony indicates that the past moment is not an absolute singularity. Each photograph testifies to the "same" authentic past, which undermines the "new" space-time category, and aligns it instead with the Western metaphysical tradition of the autonomous presence. The photograph's referent *that has been* has no identity in the photograph until it is encountered in the subject's presence, in which an Imaginary recognition may occur, projecting an identity into the object as the subject's representation of it, and allowing the Symbolic to ascribe the object a mythical connotation.

3.2.3. *The Photographic Signified and Desire*

Barthes's reflections on photography, in *Camera Lucida*, evoke the hallucinatory quality of the photograph. Shortly after her death, Barthes pursues his mother's identity as the

referent of a photograph, but in spite of his desire for a trace of her, the likeness sustains nothing more than the knowledge that she is photographed, and Barthes must provide her identity as his own unauthenticated signified, from his present. The formulation of the concepts in *Camera Lucida* often demonstrate the failing of Barthes's desire, as he searches in the photograph for a trace of the guaranteed object. For example, Barthes expresses his distaste for the colour photograph on the basis that colour appears as an artifice added to the "original truth" of the black and white photograph, where his requirement is "certainty that the photographed body touches me with its own rays and not with superadded light" (1981a, 81). Barthes is placing colour on the level of connotation, which is acceptable, yet he attempts to erase the connotation that he must also recognise in the monotone gradient, and privileges the black and white photograph as that closer to the referent. By displacing the evidence for the referent out of the image's colour, he risks assigning it to the two-dimensional form of the three-dimensional object, although he wishes to displace everything out of the image which "is already a kind of mediation" (1981a, 66). His desire for meaning as a trace of his mother unmediated by connotation leads him in search of a photographic pre-expressive stratum, which the differentiation between two systems of meaning, connotation and denotation, suggests is the fundamental structure of meaning. Finally, he admits that, whatever quality he attempts to privilege in relation to the referent, the referent is always beyond it. However, he maintains the authenticity of the image as a temporal event, and seizes upon the traces of the daylight hours as the object of his desire which has meaning beyond the limitations he encounters. The comment concerning his mother's photograph is italicised where it relates the time of the event: "the treasure of rays which emanated from my mother as a child ... *on that day*" (1981a, 82).

3.2.4. *The Social Image*

Modern society characteristically consumes the photographic image in the manner that past societies consumed beliefs (Barthes 1981a, 119), and this tendency is producing a world where the illustration of conflicts and desires minimises their social impact, Barthes claims. He suggests society is becoming indifferent, in an environment of

consumption, where the general image replaces the referent and homogenises the natures of the image and the real. Barthes's comments may border on nostalgia for the referent, if they are not placed in the context of his desire to maintain difference between representational economies, where no system dominates or establishes itself as the privileged discourse of the real, as occurs in the classical tradition. Barthes concludes *Camera Lucida* with the observation that the photograph may be either mad or tame, depending on the critical approach to its representation: "tame if its realism remains relative, tempered by aesthetic or empirical habits" (1981a, 119) and consumed as an object under the strictures of an art philosophy alien to its nature; mad, if it is confronted in "the wakening of intractable reality" (ibid.).

The distinction between the mad and the tame of photography resembles the observations Barthes makes upon the different types of reading which may be evoked in a text. The function of the code in the differing interpretations is that of weaving together the meanings, either as a unity or as a radically plural assemblage of "meanings." The criticism directed at Barthes's theory maintains that the "intractable reality" of the text does not need Barthes's expository investigation, because the text is not founded upon the critical closures which are applied in its interpretation. The following section considers the necessity of the "closed" reading, which Barthes seeks to challenge, for the development of the "open" reading.

3.3. Representation and Realism in the Novel

For Barthes, the reader's encounter with the text has a dual aspect: the readerly text (*lisible*) is the product consumed by the reader, while the writerly text (*scriptible*) is produced by the reader who acknowledges, in a reading which is basically a writing, the infinite plurality of the text. Barthes claims that the writerly cannot be displayed for discussion, but that its negative counterpart can, and is the topic of *S/Z*. The distinction between the readerly and the writerly is formulated by Barthes with an implicit closure on the representational nature of the text, compounded by his use of the realist genre to demonstrate the terminology he proposes. Johnson claims that Barthes produces his own

readerly closure on *Sarrasine* in order to write *S/Z*, and she demonstrates that Balzac's text provides its own undermining of the privileging of "the whole" in opposition to castration (1981, 169). Johnson's analysis concentrates on the difference within the Balzacian text's discourse on the whole versus castration, and the absence of the closure attributed to it by Barthes; however, she does not fully address the representational implications of Barthes's readerly text. Barthes states that he will "call any readerly text a classic text" (1974, 4), and he defines the writerly text as productive and not representative (1974, 5). An examination of the complicity between the readerly text and the realist genre (which Barthes terms representational), may conclude that the readerly is a displaced form of the pure, complete text, which leads Johnson to criticise Barthes's closure on the general grounds that "the readerly text is itself nothing other than a deconstruction of the readerly text" (1981, 172).

Johnson's article appears in a volume edited by Young, who provides a defence of Barthes by way of a preface, supplementing *S/Z* with the similar analysis of Poe's "Valdemar," which Barthes provides in Young's anthology. Young claims that the collapse of the realist narrative is conclusively demonstrated in Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," when the words "I am dead" are uttered by one of the characters, and Young observes that this "transgression is the moment when representation breaks down" (1981, 163). Young follows Barthes, stating that the tenor of the enunciation is incompatible with the conditions of its enunciation (1981, 163), which may only be accepted if the enunciation were not written, which the term "enunciation" elides. For Young, realism and representation are equivocal (he writes of "an impossible representation, the breaking-point of realism" (1981, 163)), and the erasure of writing from the scene of analysis leads Young to explain that the words of Valdemar erase the limit, life/death. The nature of "text" itself erases the limit between life and death, as Derrida notes (1982a, 24), and the general possibility of meaning is founded on the absence which the signification brings into being in representing presence. Derrida observes that "the statement 'I am alive' is accompanied by my being dead, and its possibility requires the possibility that I be dead; and conversely. This is not an

extraordinary tale by Poe but the ordinary story of language" (1973, 96-7). Barthes acknowledges Derrida's commentary, and states that his own concern is to "show that the unheard-of sentence 'I am dead' is in no way the unbelievable utterance, but much more radically the impossible enunciation" (1981b, 154). The "impossibility" of the enunciation is part of Derrida's analysis, which is not simply related to the believability of the statement, and he challenges the relationship between context and meaning. Rather than deny that the statement is impossible, Derrida points out that the enunciation is not represented in the text, and that the textual representation of the statement indicates that the enunciation is merely the theoretically privileged context of the signified presence as self-presence, in which meaning is apparently represented transparently by the spoken signifier. The conclusions regarding the enunciation of life and death are determined by Barthes as derivative from the states known as life and death. However, Derrida shows that the condition of *being* alive or dead is secondary to representation of those conditions, whereby the representation of life requires that life not be the prerequisite for its representation, and death could not be represented if it were pure absence; so, the possibility of *being* dead is the possibility of representing absence as presence in the text.

3.3.1. *Castration and Being-Castrated*

The complicity between form and presence in the logos implies that meaning is reducible to a simple origin; for example, the notion that language is the *metaphorical* transfer of meaning from one form to another also assumes that the space of the transfer is non-metaphorical (Derrida 1978, 303n.18). This non-metaphoricity is provided in the privilege given to the verb *to be*, which has a meaning simple and identical to the expression of its presence, similar to the privileged proximity of voice to thought. The notion that the sense impression of the word is elevated into the meaning implicitly recognises the form of the sense in terms of being: "all concepts of form refer back to *presence in general*" (Derrida 1973, 108). The unity of sense and meaning in the copula implies that such an elevation can never have taken place, but this implication is elided in the logical system of predication which perceives presence in form, and destines "all sense to meaning" (Derrida 1973, 127). Classically, the copula is the simple origin from

which presence as form provides the transfer of sense into the being-present of the word; however, Derrida challenges the absolute origin by demonstrating that its *spacing* includes difference within itself, and its signified is conferred by the differential system of meaning, rather than the privileged inscription from an originary force. By providing the non-metaphorical origin of being, the copula effects the closure of presence in the word by converting the relation of what is not a being-present "into an experience that has the form of being-present" (Derrida 1973, 124). The conversion of the limit case, where the being-present of the term *absence* becomes its being-absent, is the basis of *Sarrasine*, in which castration is transformed into being-castrated. The representation of lack in the text demonstrates not the collapse of representation but the persistence of meaning after the fundamental structure, connoted as providing stability, is fragmented. Therefore, the code is not the basic unit allowing the presence of meaning into the text, and the representation of the codes, by language, is revealed; so, although the code of opposition may collapse, the text itself does not.

The Zambinellan body resists codification for a reason which Barthes claims ultimately causes the narrative contract to collapse: the characters are distributed around an axis of "castrating/castrated, active/passive" and not around biological sex (Barthes 1974, 36). Yet, Johnson observes that the presence of the castrato in the narrative must be taken as evidence that the narrative does not collapse and represents the meaning of the text, which Barthes closes with his interpretation of the breaking of the contract. The castrato, La Zambinella, cannot appear in the coded opposition from which each character is derived, and functions as the flaw in the system of oppositions. Narrative can manipulate codes of knowledge about castration, but the basis of the codes cannot be codified as the "presence" of meaning, since it divides the plenitudes and cannot be situated on any one side of the opposition. Barthes views the antithetical coding of realist representation as the opposition of two pure forces, and elevates the opposition into the presence of meaning, which he then develops as pure textual force, stating that "*meaning* (and its classifying basis) is a question of life or death" (1974, 66). The influence of the figure of castration is such that "there is no longer any 'representation'" (Barthes 1974,

164), since the text narrates what cannot be coded by "making truth be *anecdotally* (and no longer symbolically) the absent phallus" (Barthes *ibid.*). The *anecdotal* castration, proposed by Barthes as the nature of Balzac's representation, displaces representation out of language and into realism, only to deny the representational capacity of the realist code, and then to state that the lack of coded castration is the demonstration of being-castrated. Absence is not unmediated by representation; as Derrida notes, the signification of presence necessarily requires the absence of the referent. Similarly, the being-castrated which Barthes discusses is not possible outside the realm of language: there can be no simple, non-metaphorical absence represented by the text. The meaning, being-castrated, is expressed in a non-binary signifying chain, so the text cannot be castrated of meaning, because it lacks an original plenitude.

Barthes concludes that "*Sarrasine* represents the very confusion of representation" (1974, 215), in the story which represents two competing discourses, one of which is merely the elided extreme of the philosophical premise of the other: textual language is natural and transparent. Therefore, *Sarrasine* does not collapse, and the general economy of representation described by Barthes is merely the limited economy of realism. He states that the economy of language is "usually protected by the separation of opposites" (1974, 215), which may lead to the conclusion that he wishes to elevate code into language. The representation of the general Writing is not collapsed in the narrative. Barthes's elision of the letter from the scene of representation leads him to conclude that representation ceases when the code is ruptured at its origin, overlooking the fact that the origin of the code is not a pure, self-identical presence; that is, it is already "ruptured."

3.3.2. *The Presence Beyond the Code*

The text refers not from "language to a referent, but from one code to another" (Barthes 1974, 55), which ultimately brings Barthes to place the coded object (for example, the body) in a position supplementary to the anterior Book, the idealised origin of the code. However, the body which cannot be coded in the novel must function there as a presence outside the realist discourse. The code may therefore become the reality of an alien form within the systematic totality of the novel. The separation of form and meaning in the

field of castration, Barthes explains, is demonstrated by the old man's body, which is "itself the semantic space - becoming meaning it becomes space" (Barthes 1974, 61) - and this results in the body described becoming a supplementary meaning: "the figure is not the sum, the frame or the support of the meanings; it is an additional meaning, a kind of diacritical paradigm" (ibid.). The body of the castrato is impossible to write into the "natural" system of representation governing the text, so the entry of Zambinella exposes the field of meaning which the text exteriorises. The textual castration is limited to the signified realm, and the entry of the semantic space of the castrato's body demonstrates that the language of realist representation, and representation in general, does not have a simple origin. The basis of meaning, castration, is also divided within itself as form and meaning, so there is no origin that representation may cite which is not reducible to other originary criteria. Barthes comments that the Marquise's touching the old man at the party, "is indeed the eruption of the signifier into reality through the wall of symbolism: it is a psychotic act" (1974, 67) which involves the "physical contact between ... two completely separate substances" (ibid. 65), the discourses. The presence of the text's meaning as form is posited by Barthes because he associates the communication of meaning with the presence of the speaking subject. The origin of meaning is therefore not present in the text, and the presence cannot be the autonomous entity of the cogito, since it is mediated by the signified. The production of meaning via the code is the secondary representation which erases the textual inscription of the code.

3.4. Communication and the Text

Barthes, describing the text as a weave of voices, elides the graphic form if the signifier, and his example of the readerly voice, supplied to unify the codes of the narrative, originates from the notion that the text communicates, and that its codes are derived from communication itself. The emphasis on the voice, weaving together the strands of the text, is complicit with Barthes's approach to representation as a representation of presence; namely, the presence of the subject. In contrast, the communicable signified represents, for Derrida, the radical absence of the subject. Derrida's grapheme is

detached from all contexts of signification, "no context can enclose it. Nor can any code" (1982a, 317), and the iterability of the inscription is proof for Derrida that it is separated from all contexts of production and therefore from communication itself, as the transfer of the presence of meaning from sender to receiver. Barthes proposes communication in the text as a force independent of writing, in general, and then returns communication to the site of the narrative as its natural, structuring origin.

Barthes does not deny the literary realm of the writing under examination, and he attempts to displace it out of the textual representation (the letter) in which it occurs. The signification of desire in the work is based on the literary, extra-textual structuration of "the - always anterior - Book and Code" (Barthes 1974, 73). The text is therefore subjected to a transcendental totalising structure, which has a position with regard to signification similar to that posited by Rousseau as the Book of Nature (Derrida 1976, 15-16), a closure similar to the anteriority of the phallus in Lacan. The code is classified as a literary representation without its having to be written, and the text is constituted as a weave of voices which "form the writing" (Barthes 1974, 160) and relieve the constraints on the "mute" letter. Barthes theorises representation in terms of the code, and language as a meaningful exchange between codes. The letter is not inscribed with the trace of the voice, or conversely, because such would destroy the claims concerning the collapse of representation in the text.

3.4.1. *The Nature of the Connoted Message*

The system of meaning incorporated in the readerly text is termed connotation, an "association made by the text-as-subject within its own system" (Barthes 1974, 8). Connotation in the novel, like that in the photograph, is naturalised by the denotation, but a further reflexive closure is possible for the novelistic codes of connotation and denotation: by connoting itself as the primary "fixed" level of meaning, the denoted elides the presence of the connoted by passing through it, bestowing on the classical text an "innocence" of its duplicity (Barthes 1974, 9). The "innocence" erases the "fallen" trace of the code in the text's realist representation, where the text "pretends to return to the nature of language, to language as nature" (Barthes 1974, 9). The effacement of the

nature of language is ascribed to the structure of the text and the force of the code, and Barthes fails to account for the representational nature of language in terms of the "mark". Signification is therefore placed under the closure of the work, and the structural erasure of the code elides the self-effacing trace of *différance* as the production of the system by the differential signifying chain.

The nature of signification for Barthes is communication, in which the expression (E) forms a relation (R) with the content (C) to establish the sign (ERC), giving the formula for connotation as (ERC)RC (Barthes 1974, 7). The differentiation of signification into two systems, one based on the other, implies that each arises from a non-representational presence. The nature of the expression cannot be distinguished from the nature of the content except through the reduction of the denotation to an inherent presence in the text. Since the denotation is something which is being signified, rather than the sound itself, as Saussure's signifier is the *sound-image*, it cannot provide a plane of expression fundamental to connotation. Derrida explains that, for Saussure, "the sound-image is what is *heard*; not the *sound* heard but the being-heard of the sound" (1976, 63). Representation is already a feature of the text, and the signification does not have an originary presence in the expression. The differential system of meaning which gives rise to the *gramme*, the mark, is detached from teleological orientation toward communication as a consequence of its being subject to repetition and re-iteration, so the text-as-subject does not have authority over an independent system.

The narrative does not reside in the written form of the text, and Barthes's erasure of writing from the narrative scene produces a model of representation which requires a pure form of expression to be elevated into the signified meaning. Consequently, Barthes equates representation with the code, which generates its own context, so its economy is closed and interacts only with itself, it "has no *object*: ... *the narrative tells itself*" (Barthes 1974, 213). The self-sufficient context has either no significance, or is an encompassing, totalising context. Barthes suggests the latter when he writes that the narrative takes the form of a contract, for which the narrative provides the economy of the exchange: "one narrates to obtain by exchanging; and it is this exchange that is

represented in the narrative itself" (Barthes 1974, 89). The contract provides a textual "simultaneity," toward which all parts of the text move and which is present in, and recoverable from, all parts of the text. The conceptualisation of the text as a form, which represents, leads to the form being summarised as a spatial and total meaning. The resulting notion of meaning as the space of the text closes the meaning in the context of the work, and allows meaning to be thought as the work's presence; however, meaning and textual space cannot be simply derived from each other.

3.5. Meaning, Structure, Desire

An encounter between Zambinella and Sarrasine produces a section of dialogue in which each "line is a snare, a misuse, and each misuse is justified by a code" (Barthes 1974, 154). Barthes describes that the exchange gives rise to the "scene" where codes are exchanged as they are "hurled back and forth" in the operation of the contract, and his description of the code's *misuse* implies an originary, irreducible context for each code. Formulating the text's functioning as the contract of exchange, Barthes displaces the traditional critical argument relating to form and meaning, by denying the significance of meaning and expressing form as desire. The desire expressed in the "scene" is the need of each side for the other. Effectively, the "scene" manifests desire as a binary opposition. For Lacan, desire situates the Other in the locus of the signifier, but Barthes's model places the desiring subjects on either side of the signifier, since each has an irreducible discursive origin. Textual desire is structurally opposed to meaning by Barthes, yet the signified itself expresses lack, so desire cannot be displaced out of the signifying chain as the conflict between opposing discourses. The exchange ends with the last word, and the goal of each discourse is to have that last word; the "scene" has no meaning: its significance is in the pleasure of the exchange, prolonging a potentially infinite round of mutual recognition in language, so the end of the exchange is the only measure of significance, and the last word is of the highest order of significance (Barthes 1978, 204-9). The codes confront each other with the force of their systematisation, and where there is a coded "protocol of results" (Barthes 1974, 155) the stronger force will

subvert the systematics of the other by appropriating them into its larger field of meaning. Barthes's theory that the "scene" has no meaning undermines his own claims of the signification of the code, since the misuse of a code depends on the closure of its signifying context; the code is therefore not the fundamental signifying force in the text. Furthermore, the systematisation of the code is an example of Barthes's theoretical model erasing one aspect of signification in the text, only to return it at a later stage as the derivative of the structure which erases it. The "force of meaning depends on its degree of systematisation" (1974, 154), Barthes writes; however, the separation of meaning from its force implies that pure meaning and pure structure exist separately from each other. Desire is evoked by lack, not structural opposition, and Barthes's formulation of language as code provides the structural context for him to displace meaning out of language and replace it with coded desire.

3.6. Desire and Code: The Function of Myth in Barthes: Conclusions

Barthes's notion of representation locates the meaning of the text in the social discourse, the doxa, on the topic denoted. The code must be recognised by the reader, and the Symbolic function it has in the text is that of objectification in recognition, so the desire which Barthes claims the code expresses in the narrative contract may be inverted, to claim that Barthes has collapsed the desire for meaning which identifies the code and defined it in terms of desire as meaning. The structure of the code, as a signifying whole, is derived from the Lacanian *points de capiton*, and Barthes's application of the concept to the written or visual text also follows Lacan in erasing the letter from the scene of representation, and analysing the text as if it were spoken.

The code refers to the "already written" without being written itself, or experiencing the distortions of mediation, Barthes's analysis implies. He interprets the realist novel by presenting the realist code as a privileged form of representation, and he subjects other forms of representation to evaluation through the criteria of representation in the novel. Communication is posited as the teleological nature of the code, and Barthes erases the

mediation of the code in his assessment of its meaning. The code is idealised in Barthes, which inevitably leads to the reconstitution of a basic form, from which it is elevated, and the context which provides this is the traditional privileging of speech. Communication is described in terms of the spoken utterance, despite the fact that it may be a written utterance which is under consideration.

The production of meaning in the text results from the field of knowledge being objectified in the text by the subject. The doxa therefore replaces the mediation of language by providing a plenitude which the text represents. The text represents absence of meaning, however; and of Barthes's proposal concerning textual desire reinscribes the Lacanian centrism. Desire and meaning are the effects of the signified absence, produced by the "presence" of the signified. Absence does not require an auxiliary structure, such as myth or the *points de capiton*, to provide a theoretical account of signification. Such attempts produce a topology of castration, and elide the differential medium of the signifying chain.

4 Representation in Cinema

4.1. *Introduction*

The distinction Barthes makes between the photographic still and the motion picture relates to the temporal element of the representation. The photograph, he claims, represents the *having-been-there* of the thing, whereas the cinema presents its *being-there*. Furthermore, his "new space-time" category is assigned an hallucinatory appeal, while the cinematic image, it is felt, "is simply an illusion" (1981a, 117). The photographic signified is given extensive treatment, by Barthes, with respect to its mutational economy, and his analysis works within the presupposition of a temporal exterior, to which the signified may be related. Critical discussions about cinematic signification generally acknowledge that the analogical reproduction of the object is not proof of the signified's origin, yet the analogical representation is not frequently challenged with questions about the original temporality of the filmic representation. Attempts at mediating in cinematic representation, to disrupt the closure of mythical signifieds, have concentrated on the perceptibility of the apparatus and editing as the means to subvert the nature of "presence" in the image. However, such notions focus on an abstract plane of representation, governed by structural analysis and preconceptions about the influence of the technical aspects of production on the plenitude of the image. The general nature of signification itself is not questioned.

That is, the cinematic image is not *simply* an illusion. It is inscribed with a non-simple origin in the erasure of *différance*, which makes possible the basic perception of the photograph as the freezing of an instant in time, and the interpretation of cinema as the unfreezing of the temporal continuum. The following analysis of the motion picture examines the influence of the projection of the image on the critical beliefs concerning the signification of the image. The cinematic projection may therefore be compared with the production of meaning in speech, and the metaphysical conclusions drawn from the

privileged context of the utterance, in erasing the mediation of the signifier.

The erasure of cinematic mediation may be partially disrupted at the level of narrative through editing style. For example, the devices which traditionally frame "the woman" as spectacle in mainstream cinema may be parodied, and their elisions exposed. Such devices are not fundamental to the signification of cinema, however, and a more extensive intrusion into the closure of cinematic signification must expose the production of the signified, and the relationship it has with the analogical recording. *Desperately Seeking Susan* is selected as an example of mainstream film which is critical of the traditional representation of women in cinema narrative, since it draws attention to the mediation of film in the production of the signified. Susan, the character played by Madonna, is fragmented by the ambiguous nature of Madonna's representation, since in one section she appears visually as Susan and aurally as Madonna. The Symbolic, differential origin of the femininity embodied by Madonna is evoked by the carnivalesque transformation of her appearance, and the resulting gender ambiguity displaces the phallus from central position in the signification of desire.

4.2. The Cinematic Signifier

The recording process of film and video requires the presence of light, which leads some theorists to suggest that the signification in cinema is founded on the opposition of light and dark, or, as Brunette claims, the "presence and absence of light" (1986, 61). The opposition of light and dark is not differential, and the "presence" of light in this context is not the presence of the signified, but is the transcendental notion of self-presentation; the presence of light may be aligned with the sound-image signifier in Saussure, which involves the being-heard, or being-seen, of the medium, and is not a pure experience of the signifier. The signification of the image is elided in critical discussion which moves directly from consideration of the photological nature of film to the formal nature of the shot.

The cinematic signified is an effect of the differential signifying chain, and cinematic projection provides a context in which the signified presence of the image elides its

representational status, and allows appraisal of the recording as an originary continuum. Barthes's temporal hallucination in the photograph is founded on the inseparability of mark and production; and, in relation to the motion picture, the photograph may be held as "the non-present *remaining* of a differential mark cut off from its alleged 'production,'" which Derrida provides as an account for the exteriorisation of the letter (1982a, 318). The cinematic image is not "marked" in the manner of the photograph, since the projection elides the moment of production and temporality associated with the image. The photograph and the cinematic image are not simply reducible to the signifier and signified of the Saussurian sign, which "carries within itself the necessity of privileging the phonic substance" (Derrida 1987b, 21). Saussure's sign is structured in complicity with the context of its posited origin, the spoken utterance. So, cinematic signification (and signification in general) is not inherently tracable to basic structures, and the attempt to theorise such structures results in the privileging of specific contexts, as I discuss below with regard to Metz and Mulvey. The apparent transparency of the signifier, which in speech is perceived as the unveiling of thought, assigns a continuous presence to the objects signified in the image. The motion in the image appears to signify the temporal continuity of Real presence; however, the critical analyses of temporality in cinema often assume that temporality is something other than an integral part of signification. The meaning of the temporality of the image is explored as something, which, having been unveiled by the transparency of the signifier, is hidden by the signified. The signified is therefore placed in a position derivative from a fundamental presence.

4.2.1. *The Experience of Time*

The experience of duration is critically represented as something which is veiled in the viewer's absorption in cinema. However, the nature of "experience" must be questioned, for the image is not simply seen, but is being-seen as an already mediated structure. The signification of film is not localised in the moment of experience, because "experience" is complicit with the metaphysics of the sign, to the "extent that it [experience] is not separated from the field of the mark" (Derrida 1982a, 318). Experimental work related to

the duration of the film projection is often complicit with the displacement of temporality from the scene of representation into a transcendental category. A film by Le Grise (1973), *White Field Duration*, attempts, Heath notes, to "establish the length of projection time as a material experience by exposing the viewer to a white screen" (1981, 166). The exploration of duration in the work is a repetition of the structuralist analysis of the total space of the book, since Heath states that the reduction of the cinema to light and screen is a reduction to "the very limits of its physical supports," (1981, 170) which is equivalent to the elevation of temporality out of signification in order to state that the meaning of a work may be summarised by its duration. Any attempt to translate the signification of meaning into a spatial or temporal form merely suppresses the effect which is being sought; as Derrida explains, "*to comprehend* the structure of a becoming, the form of a force, is to lose meaning by finding it" (1978, 26). The delineation of form and space erases the necessity of meaning's expression as form, and does not recognise that the work is a totality, within a differential context. That is, the work cannot be fragmented and summarised within the context of its autonomous structure, for such would elide the general scene of representation and ascribe the origin of the signification to an idealisation of the text. Therefore, because meaning cannot be extracted from the form of the work, films such as Le Grise's do not expose a fundamental aspect of cinematic signification.

Duration may be acknowledged in the discussion of a narrative. Yet, duration is not a continuum of full presence, so it has no inherent quality which allows it to provide closure in analysis. The event recorded on film has no inherent durational plenitude, and duration is the mediation of meaning. The temporal nature of cinema is not derived from a temporal plenitude outside the projection. The slow motion sequence exposes the discontinuity between the duration of projection and the originary duration, whereby both are placed in a secondary relationship to the mediation of the signified. The continuity of duration may be challenged by relating the projection to the production of speech. Derrida shows that the signified is an effect of *spacing*, so the deferral of autonomous presence in the signified means that in speech the signifying chain is not present as a pure

temporal continuum.

4.2.2. *Discontinuity and the Shot Boundary*

The shot is perceived by most critics as a homogeneous unit, marked by discontinuity at its boundaries (both spatial and temporal), and the significance of the boundary is elided. The shot is therefore categorised by the opposition of inside and outside, in which the discontinuity of the representation is elided by the continuous "presence" within the shot. The significance of the disruption of the shot boundary is erased by the "presence" of the shot, as the margin effaces its "secondary" position by presenting the shot. The indispensibility of the shot boundary may be compared with Derrida's description of the effect of the tympanic membrane, which allows sounds to be heard by disrupting their transmission. The unity of the shot is not merely a structural concern for critics, for the presence of the image as shot is related to the ideological "interior" of cinema: the representation of continuous presence.

Heath comments, in the context of a discussion on the conflict between continuity of action in the narrative and continuity of space in the shot, that "classically continuity is built on fragmentation rather than the long take," (1981, 43). The notion of fragmentation is described by Heath in a manner which suggests that the film medium transparently fragments the space which it signifies, and that the signification of unified space is not dependent on the inherent fragmentation of the shot. That is, the possibility of introducing the shot boundary implies that the shot originates through discontinuity, so the "exterior" discontinuity cannot be excluded from the "interior" presence. The shot has no fundamental state of repleteness; rather, it is discontinuous at each "instant" of its signifying continuous presence. The nature of the inside/outside opposition is not primary, because it arises through the differential signification, which ultimately indicates that the shot cannot be privileged as the fundamental unit of meaning in cinema. The exterior and interior of the shot, and the marking of the exterior by the boundary, are of equal significance.

4.3. Cinema and Vision

Both Metz and Mulvey focus on the specular nature of the cinematic image, while failing to examine the criteria upon which they judge the nature of the specular. Mulvey operates from the privileged context of the look, and she relates that it is "the place of the look that defines cinema" (1985, 314). An investigation into their theories shows that they both use privileged contexts which displace the film medium from a general scene of representation and into a closed order of meaning. For example, Mulvey claims that the spectacle of "the woman" in narrative has a disruptive effect on continuity, ultimately taking the film in which it occurs "into a no-man's-land outside its own time and space" (1985, 309). The time and space of film according to Mulvey is mediated for the spectator by the gaze of the principal, masculine character. So, in the collapse of narrative with the appearance of the spectacle, the "erotic image appears directly (without mediation) to the spectator" (Mulvey 1985, 314). The analysis of spectacle in terms of the male gaze, relayed through the main protagonist, closes the field of inquiry, and places the nature of the film as medium in a position secondary to the controlling gaze. Furthermore, the nature of the gaze and the look is not explicitly examined, and does not include Lacan's differentiation of the visual field into functions of the gaze and the eye. Lacan notes that the subject's visual environment is "the spectacle of the world" (1979, 75), so the nature of spectacle is not restricted to the feminine appearance, although Lacan refers to the lure of the gaze in the phallogocentric context of the veil as feminine desire for the phallus. Specific examples are drawn from *Desperately Seeking Susan*, in order to demonstrate that the object under the gaze cannot be privileged as a feature of the medium or dominant cinematic practice, since neither are fundamental signifying units.

4.3.1. *The Mirror Scene*

Metz bases his notion of signification in film on the Lacanian mirror stage, and he describes the stage as a necessary step in the subject's ability to understand film, for it is associated with the entry into the Symbolic. However, Metz extends the significance of vision in the entry into language, and constructs an allegorical scenario which effectively incorporates the technical processes of cinematic projection into the functioning of the

Symbolic. The signifying chain in cinema, according to Metz, "depends on a series of mirror-effects organised in a chain, and not on a single reduplication" (1985, 790). The privilege bestowed on the mirror as site of cinematic representation elides film's Symbolic nature, and the Symbolic is confined within the presence of the subject, on the basis that the subject initially provides the source of the reflection in the mirror. In the case of the gaze directed at the screen, Metz writes, "the film is what I receive, and it is also what I release, since it does not pre-exist my entering the auditorium and I need only close my eyes to suppress it" (1985, 790). The subject's recognition of the objects on the screen, as a projection of the subject in the *objet a*, does require the presence of the subject for the *act* of recognition, however, the presence of the subject is not the fundamental origin of the recognition, which is produced by the differential signifying chain. The subject therefore releases the signified of the image, as Metz states, but the effect pre-exists the subject's entry into the cinema, and is not simply suppressed by interrupting the gaze directed at the screen. Experience, as Derrida notes, is complicit with the mark, so the possibility of experience indicates that the cinematic signifier has a signifying structure which is exterior to the subject, which Metz recognises in the Symbolic but then displaces by privileging the specular scene of the mirror.

The idealistic chaining of mirrors erases the effect of *différance* and reduces the signification of cinema to the reflective presence of the mirror; from which, Metz posits the presence and absence of the object in transcendental terms of self-presentation: the mirror of the screen is not "a 'purely' symbolic-imaginary site, for the absence of the object and the codes of the absence are really produced in it by the *physis* of an equipment" (1985, 796). The emphasis on the mirror leads Metz to suggest that while the objects represented in cinema (reflected in its mirror) are absent, the mirror of the screen is itself present, as is the gaze, as the structure supporting the representation, in the spectator's identification with the camera. For the desire expressed in the scopic drives to be communicated in cinema, the gaze cannot be outside the Symbolic, and cannot be relayed between character and spectator as if it were an object. The Symbolic aspect of the gaze requires it to be imagined in the field of the Other, and it is not

something which is seen, Lacan states. In Metz's description, the gaze is itself meaningful, and is not simply the locus through which meaning is relayed; therefore, the gaze cannot be separated from the scene of representation, since meaning indicates the mediation of the Symbolic. Metz's mirror is formulated as the site upon which the gaze is cast, making his theory complicit with an erasure of the mediation of the representation.

4.4. Textual Opacity in *Desperately Seeking Susan*

In the analysis of mainstream film narrative, theorists such as Mulvey acknowledge features specific to cinematic representation, such as the gaze, but generally evaluate narrative an abstract frame. The abstraction elides the mediation of the signified by the film medium, and features of narrative are naturalised as transparent aspects of the film signification. The naturalisation follows phallogentric reasoning and presents "the woman" as the transparent site of the representation of desire in narrative, and the masculine character's gaze as the transparent expression of masculine desire.

Desperately Seeking Susan presents difficulties for cinema criticism such as Mulvey's, because its narrative lacks a central masculine protagonist, and conventional narrative devices are incorporated in a disjunctive, parodic manner. The characterisation of the two women, Susan and Roberta, and the relationship between them is not merely the result of placing females in parts conventionally played by males. The enigma of femininity, a traditional narrative topic in various media, is exposed for critical examination in *Desperately Seeking Susan*, since the narrative mediation of the enigma as spectacle is presented from a perspective with the traditional object as subject. The representation of desire is therefore shown as a Symbolic effect, in which the mediation is elided so the signified appears to be derived from a plenitude, traditionally "the woman." The character of Susan embodies many mythical feminine traits, and the film represents Susan as a figure constructed in the scene of representation, rather than from a simple origin; which is a movement toward the non-essentialist interpretation of representation.

The following analysis discusses the film's presentation of the Symbolic origin of meaning. Although the Lacanian terminology may have logocentric foundations, it is used for compatibility with the psychoanalytical work of Mulvey and Metz, and the "Symbolic" is a useful label, since it describes the subject's irreversible entry into language and the mediation of the Real by the signifying chain. *Desperately Seeking Susan* is found to present an artificial narrative "space," in which the textual issues of authority and meaning, as I discuss in the work of Kolbowski and Sherman, draw the film medium into the scene of representation. The effect is not merely a reflexive gesture, which would discuss cinema transparently through the cinema; rather, the nature of meaning is problematised in visual and linguistic contexts, as well as in relation to cinematic narrative conventions. The issues of representation in the narrative are analysed here as issues under mediation, so the conclusions drawn from them relate to their being represented in the film medium. That is, the cinematic scene is a constraint on the discussion of the representation of "the woman," rather than a privileged point of access. There is no scene outside the limitations encountered, merely different scenes in different media, and which all refer back to Derrida's general scene of Writing.

4.4.1. *Narrative Outline*

The following is a general description of the relationships between characters and events, and is intended to contextualise the individual segments of discussion on the film's narrative in the main body of the text. *Desperately Seeking Susan* uses many conventional narrative structures, so it appears in the outline as a rather traditional film. The points of interest occur in the film's deviance within the conventions of mainstream cinema, and the deviations are presented in my general discussion, which elaborates many of the theoretical issues raised in previous chapters.

The opening of the film shows Roberta in a beauty salon, in New York. The following section is in Atlantic City, and shows Susan in an expensive hotel suite, where she is lying on the floor, taking self-portraits with a polaroid camera. The narrative ensues from the confusion which results when the identities of Susan and Roberta are mistaken by Nolan (a criminal) and Des (a friend of Susan's boyfriend, Jim), after

Roberta loses her memory while in possession of some items which belonged to Susan, namely a distinctive jacket. Susan is detained by the police after she is unable to pay the cab fare for her ride to collect her belongings from Roberta, thereby allowing the narrative to become complicated as the mistaken identities are left unrealised for those concerned. Roberta's husband (Gary, a spa pool retailer) traces Roberta's actions leading up to her disappearance, and eventually locates Susan, who is unwilling to help because she thinks Roberta is collaborating with Nolan. A farcical chase scene which resolves the confusion between the characters occurs at a magic club where Susan arranges a meeting with Roberta after realising that Nolan is actually associated with Bruce (his accomplice in a jewelry theft) with whom she shared the hotel room in Atlantic City.

Susan and Jim frequently correspond through the personal column of a newspaper called *The Mirror*, which Roberta reads, recording their exchanges in her diary. Roberta's interest in their adventures leads her to attempt to identify them at the meeting when Susan returns from Atlantic City before Jim leaves town. After the meeting Roberta follows Susan and obtains the jacket which Susan exchanges for some boots in a second hand shop. Having found a key in the jacket pocket, Roberta tries to contact Susan through the newspaper. Jim is suspicious when he sees Roberta's message, signed "A Stranger," because Susan has told him that the man she was with in Atlantic City has just been killed (presumably by his accomplice, Nolan, for being unable to produce the stolen Egyptian earrings which Susan "innocently" pocketed when she left him sleeping in the hotel room). Jim, who is away from New York with a rock band, asks Des to go to the meeting which Roberta has arranged at the Battery Park waterfront.

Des has not previously met Susan, so Jim describes her over the telephone, and the description occurs as voice-over, while the camera shows Roberta dressing and making herself up as Susan. The descriptions match, and Roberta is shown reflected in a mirror, along with Susan's polaroid self-portrait, which was in the jacket, along with a key and Des's telephone number.

Roberta loses her memory after striking her head on a pole, and Des, thinking she is

Susan, takes her back to his apartment, because he promised Jim, that he would look after her. Nolan, who causes Roberta's injury follows them, and the confusion and pursuit continues. Roberta regains her memory when she strikes her head a second time after being chased from the magic club by Nolan. When she rings Gary, he and Susan are stoned, so she rings Des and decides not to return to Gary, and continues working at the *Magic Box*.

4.4.2. *Typology and Desire: The Language Barrier*

Desperately Seeking Susan presents the characters' interaction with the representation of desire, and shows that the media and language prove a barrier to the expression and satisfaction of desire, rather than of assistance in its pursuit. The object of desire, when held in idealist terms by a character, is lost when mediated by language, and the reason for the desire becomes unclear. Traditionally, the object of desire is clearly marked off from the other characters, and the feminine apparel and cosmetic spectacle are utilised as transparent signifiers, since "the woman" is also the object of desire. The classical cinema typology of the feminine object as a transparent locus of desire is placed in a problematic position when Des tries to help Roberta regain her memory by filling her in on Susan's past, and gives a description of Jim. The verbal description may also be applied to him; Roberta realises the similarity, kisses Des, and then apologises. The origin of the desire is located in the representation of the object, since Susan/Roberta's desire is displaced onto Des on the basis of the description. The naturalisation of desire by "the woman" is lost when the object of the description is male, so the representation of the object is foregrounded as the locus of desire, rather than originating from an essential presence of the object.

Susan travels by cab to the meeting advertised by Roberta, and while Susan is putting on make-up, the cab driver's monologue parodies the mythical status of the New York cabbie as a repository of trivia and public knowledge (doxa). The speech utterances of the driver are circular and contradictory, and he states his taste in food, which he bases on the name of the item rather than its taste. He tells Susan that everyone, these days, goes for Sushi. He expresses his distaste for "the stuff," and then comments: "Although

I'll tell you I had some the other day. I took it home, I cooked it. It wasn't bad. It tasted like fish." The cab scene is significant because the driver's opinions are ordered by the Symbolic, rather than his experience with the Real. The social order of representation, under the name of the law, is implicitly assigned a differential origin in the Symbolic, rather than the transcendental concept of justice; when the driver states, as Susan is detained, "I know the law," his knowledge is based on the representation of the law, and the decentring of the Symbolic indicates that the law does not fundamentally transcend representation.

4.4.3. *The Veil and the Other*

Kolbowski challenges the signification of desire in cosmetic ornamentation by disrupting the closure of the masculine gaze. In *Desperately Seeking Susan*, the cosmetic is acknowledged as a signifier of desire, but the object of desire is not closed in a phallogocentric context. The visual codes of mainstream cinema are appropriated in the film, to demonstrate that they are not inherent signifiers of masculine desire. Entering the film as a transient, non-localised Symbolic figure, Madonna subverts the realism of the conventional narrative.

The masquerade, which Lacan interprets as the desire to connote the veiling of the phallus, is displaced by Susan's signification of desire in the lure of "the image," because the signifiers have no stable context in which to elide their presence. The veil of cosmetics is represented in the film's opening section, in the beauty salon, where it is objectified on the female body (facial cosmetics are tested on the hand) without the context allowing it to objectify the female body itself, and Lacan's essentialist association of the veiling signifier with castration is replaced with its representation as a signifier in a differential system, with no central lack. Susan's relationship with the woman working as magician's assistant at the *Magic Box* is presented as an enigma, which has greater significance than predication in the context of mainstream cinema which elides the lesbian potential in relationships between women. Susan invites herself to her friend's apartment, and at the apartment there is a shot of Susan's friend painting her toenails. The shot, similar to one in the opening sequence in the salon, disrupts pre-emptory

conclusions that in either context the makeup is being applied for male satisfaction. The ambiguity in the context of the application of the cosmetics does not allow the practice to embody the essence of any particular gender, and to show that desire in the decentred subject is a structural phenomenon, in which the Other has no inherent restriction on the object within its locus. The application of the cosmetics in different contexts indicates that the signification is void of communicative substance, and the traditional notion of transparency is a phallogocentric closure.

The physical appearance of Madonna does not represent the external form of a stable internal essence, since she assembles garments, mythically imbued with femininity, in contradictory arrangements. Fiske notes that "combining the crucifix with the signs of pornography is a carnivalesque profanity," which challenges the iconicity of the items, and emptys them of significance (1987a, 252-3). The synchronic conflict within each set of garments is augmented and prevented from being quantified as a stable form of inversion by Madonna's constant permutation of apparel; she often changes before the camera in public space without connoting the revelation of a bodily essence underneath, because her use of undergarments as outerpieces subverts the impression that layers are being removed and that the revelation entails "truth." The transition in Madonna's representation prevents the arbitrary signifier from signifying in a closed context, and from essentialising the representation since nothing inherently feminine is represented. Gender identity is disrupted in Madonna's image, and the resulting connotation is the refusal to acknowledge essentialising codes by disrupting their "fundamental" production of meaning.

4.4.4. *The Logic of the Signifier*

Among Susan's belongings, Roberta (with memory loss) finds the photograph of a neon sign for a club called the *Magic Box*, and goes there in the hope of finding more about her past; she arrives shortly after Susan's friend is sacked (for insubordination rather than incompetence), and is offered the position, which she accepts. The "natural" objectification of the female body for the pleasure of the male gaze is inverted in the scenes performed by Roberta as magician's assistant. Roberta's incompetence has no

detrimental effect on the enthusiasm of the male spectators, while the women in the audience shown no satisfaction from the spectacle. Before she is replaced, Susan's friend complains that she cannot perform the tricks because she is not allowed to wear her glasses; and the process through which she arrives in the locus of spectacle replicates the Lacanian logic of the phallus: she is a spectacle in that she does not have her own (spectacles), as the mother's desire is the phallus because she does not have it. The representation of "the woman" as spectacle collapses the signifier and signified by combining *spectacle* and spectacles, respectively, and replicates the "*determined situation*," for which Derrida criticises Lacan; that is, the use of the male body to provide the penis as the symbol for the phallus, and as what the mother does not have. Lacan's inscription of the female body with the criteria for the natural Other is subverted when the phallogocentric terminology is displaced by that centred on the gaze. The representation of sexual difference by the displaced signifier is an arbitrary distinction, governed by cultural constraints on the wearing of glasses onstage; and the synonymous use of penis and phallus to determine sexual difference is revealed as a phallogocentric grounding of the Symbolic. Through Roberta, the text appropriates the secondary position of assistant and transforms it into a display of control and skill, which is appreciated by everyone in the audience at the later performance, except Gary, who cannot see past his own representation of Roberta as a domestic housewife.

The position of spectacle, which Roberta fills proficiently, is detached from the associations of the passive objectification of an essential femininity for the male gaze, and the performance is represented as a Symbolic act, which is "outside" the subject of its presentation. That is, the authority over the work or performance piece is not presented in terms of the classical authorial closure, and the scene's basis on the "spectacle" causes the film to present its own opacity, since the narrative is not halted or transparently subjected to distortions in its time and space. The film may be analysed differently from Mulvey's suggestion by arguing that the spectacle has no special position outside the narrative, and that claims such as Mulvey's are restrictive in the possibilities which they allow film representation, since they elide the representation of the look as it occurs in

cinema. Mulvey implies that the voyeuristic image involves a pure act of seeing. However, representation is not elided by the signified, which could not be determined without mediation. The position held by Roberta suggests that there is no ideal spectator, because the film represents the pleasure of both men and women in the audience. The significant point of the scene relates to the lack of transparency in the image of the spectacle, and the removal of an essentialist form of authorial closure in the performance.

4.5. Narrative Transparency and "The Woman"

The photographs Susan takes of herself in the hotel have a status similar to the film-still simulacra in which Sherman photographs herself in the guise of "the woman" from the B-grade genre. Because Susan is the photographer, she is neither simply the object nor the subject of the representation, and she selects a photograph to keep as an accessory, rather like a piece of jewelry or a garment. Classically, the object of the photograph is "the woman," as Cook and Johnston discuss in "The Place of Woman in the Cinema of Raoul Walsh." Cook and Johnston show that female characters in films by Walsh are often mistakenly categorised by critics as strong, independent women, when they are actually trapped as signs within a system of exchange representing patriarchal values. They claim, "woman is not only a sign in a system of exchange, but an empty sign" (1985, 381). The narrative function of the image of "the woman" in relation to masculine desire is the representation of lack through castration, which Cook and Johnston explain in Lacanian terms. They cite Mamie Stover, in *The Revolt of Mamie Stover*, as the example of a woman who takes control of the narrative, until its economic force ultimately reasserts itself, by gaining financial control over the circulation of the fetishised image of herself as "the woman" (1985, 383). The lack represented by "the woman" is reappraised in *Desperately Seeking Susan*, and the photographic images do not ultimately reinscribe the character into the patriarchal values because the image is placed outside the circulation which Cook and Johnston attribute to a central lack outside the scene of representation. The images of Susan are inscribed with lack at the level of the differential signifying chain, and the mediation of the image disrupts the narrative fetishisation which

traps the female characters in Walsh. By presenting the nature of the production of the image, *Desperately Seeking Susan*, decentres representation, and resists the inscription of the image with patriarchal values. Cook and Johnston's analysis is problematic in that the theoretical transparency of the image as fetish within the narrative allows critics to state that the nature of the image is transparent for the film audience, and raises problems for the theorisation of a feminist film practice which may escape the closed representation they hypothesise. In the narrative, by presenting the mediation in the production of the image, and the detachment of authorial presence from the signified of the image, the nature of the image presented to the audience is foregrounded, and the narrative cannot elide its mediation. Such elision is the case when Cook and Johnston state that Mamie Stover ultimately "remains trapped within the diegetic space which the film has allotted to her" (1985, 383). In *Desperately Seeking Susan*, the diegetic space is presented as artificial, so its ability to trap or present reality is negated.

Roberta is represented through photographs which proliferate contradictory statements about her identity, and demonstrate that the photographic representation has no validity as a transparent representation. Although the wedding photograph of Roberta allows the police to realise they have apprehended her as a suspected prostitute, the mug shot represents the extreme opposite of the wedding image. The police endeavour to hand Roberta over to Gary, her husband; however, she contacts Des and he bails her out before Gary arrives. So, the law and patriarchal ownership are introduced as the controlling force in the Symbolic realm (the conflicting images of Roberta are placed under the one identity by the police), but the detachment of Roberta from her representation allows her to remain outside its complete control. Roberta's position as performer at the *Magic Box* is distinguished from the nature of the position previously held by Susan's friend, because Roberta's photograph does not appear in the "performing tonight" display after the photograph of Susan's friend is removed. The absence is one of lack, and the lack is that of representation rather than the figure of "the woman" as signifier of castration.

4.5.1. *Madonna/Susan and the Symbolic*

Classically, a star would perform in the guise of a character, and the material performed would be ascribed to the character played by the star, so musical material incorporated from outside the narrative would be appropriated by the character, to provide a unified origin for the performance. Madonna is the star figure in *Desperately Seeking Susan*, so the performance of her music is a site where the unity of the narrative is potentially fragmented. In fact, the film utilises Madonna's star presence to rupture the unity of its representation, and to draw attention to the nature of "the woman" as spectacle. The performance of Madonna's "Into the Groove" occurs in the naturalised setting of a disco, where Gary is meeting Susan in order to track down Roberta, since the shop attendant, who sells Susan's jacket to Roberta, tells Gary that Susan returned looking for her key and has left a contact number. As Gary enters the disco, Susan is standing next to a jukebox, which is presumably the source of the soundtrack. However, Madonna and Susan are "co-present" in the scene, because Madonna appears as both the character Susan (to whom the jukebox selection may be attributed, although the multiple representation simultaneously disrupts the notion of causality) and she occurs in the soundtrack as Madonna, and no attempt is made by the Susan character to assimilate Madonna's music.

The multiple position occupied by Madonna raises questions about the nature of the persona she represents, and the representational status of the music and film associated with her identity is also challenged. Madonna's origin is the Symbolic realm of film and media myth about women, and essentialist closure of her identity is prevented by the dynamic construction of her image. The real Madonna both enters the scene and is erased from it, in a style similar to the problematic of subject/object in Sherman's B-grade film-still simulacra, since the film incorporates visual and acoustic signifieds with different origins. The mediation of the film and soundtrack is exposed, and the origin of the representation is categorised as a differential phenomenon, dependent on its representation for isolation. The representation of "the woman" in the classical spectacle elides its mediation by unifying the performance in the origin of its presentation, while

Madonna's figure is displaced from the Real into the Symbolic, by representing the mediation of the spectacle through separate origins in sound and film.

When Susan and Gary leave, they pass a tee-shirt depicting Marilyn Monroe. The tradition of femininity inscribed in the figure of Madonna includes that represented by Monroe, both for physical similarities and for their "ability to embody masculine fantasy" (Fiske 1987b, 271) (Madonna's "Material Girl" video is styled upon the "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend" sequence). The ability to embody a desired characteristic is used to empty that characteristic of inherent meaning; since the re-iteration is repetition, the nature of the signification originates from the signifying chain and not the female body. The image of Madonna/Susan, disseminated through various media in the film, recontextualises media symbols of femininity by focussing on their production in the Symbolic.

4.5.2. *The Media and Mythical Femininity*

The appropriation and inscription of femininity by the general media is raised from two different perspectives, in *Desperately Seeking Susan*. Roberta is shown in the domestic realm performing culinary tasks in synchronisation with Julia Child, a cooking show host well known for her iconoclastic behaviour and play upon the *glissement* of the signifier. When Gary enters the kitchen he greets both Roberta and Julia, which makes a statement of comparison for the audience between the presence of Julia Child as cooking show host in the "natural" setting of the kitchen, and the position of Roberta there, in relation to the audience. Gary's greeting is demeaning in the superficial context of the narrative, but the relationship of Julia Child to Roberta is problematic in that it raises the point that the relationship, to the audience, of Roberta and the media persona manipulated by Julia Child is not transparent, in the sense which Julia Child's is for Gary. Stacey (1987) limits her interpretation of the kitchen scene to an indication of the difference between Susan and Roberta, since Roberta's competence is restricted to her home life, where she "manages to synchronise with a televised cooking show, catching up on its dinner preparations with confident dexterity in her familiar domestic environment" (1987, 60). However, the cooking show is not just *any* show, and Stacey's elision of the nature of

Julia Child's show indicates that she accepts the transparency of the film medium, and loses the significance of Julia Child's difference from traditional cooking show hosts.

The film presents the devaluation of women's concerns, as they are trivialised and sensationalised in the media, when Gary's sister (Lesley) speculates on Roberta's absence being motivated by sexual and personal dissatisfaction with Gary. Lesley is rebuked by Larry (Gary's dentist with whom she is acquainted), who asks if the subject was revealed to her on Phil Donoghue's chat show. The nature of the media representation of women is questioned by the conflicting positions expressed by Larry's rebuke: one holds that women are excluded from the scene of their representation (they are spoken for), while the other trivialises anything related to women because it may have appeared in the public media.

The media is represented in the film reductively representing objects within the closed set of categories through which it simplifies the world. Gary's Oasis advertisement promises to satisfy (masculine) fantasies, by using women as decorative accessories. The Oasis advertisement is first seen as it is screened on television during a party at the Glass's, the occasion coinciding with Roberta's birthday. Roberta does not enjoy the advertisement, and gazes at the New York city skyline, while the voice-over slogan for the advertisement, "At Gary's Oasis, all your fantasies can come true," is heard. When Roberta has lost her memory and is being pursued by Nolan (Bruce's accomplice who thinks she is Susan, on the basis of her jacket), she stumbles into the office of a security guard and asks for assistance. The guard willingly obliges and in his absence Roberta notices the television which is playing in the office. The television shows the final moments of a woman performing as spectacle in a classical Hollywood musical piece, after which Gary's advertisement begins. The second time the Oasis advertisement is played, the voices of the women who call Gary to join them in a spa pool are dubbed in Spanish. The dubbing in translation clearly detaches the desire they express from an original source, and the assimilation of the advertisement by the movie soundtrack places the soundtrack in the same context of mediation. The main text of the advertisement is translated into Spanish, but the voice-over slogan remains in English,

which reveals that the women in the advertisement represent the guarantee of the statement, while not being included in the actual enunciation; they have the traditional function of naturalising the desire in the message.

4.6. Classical Narrative Logic

The production of meaning in cinema is classically defined as a linear phenomenon. Heath proposes that this linear movement may be termed "narrativization, the constant conversion to narrative, catching up the subject in the image and in the film as its narration" (1981, 107); and he further defines narrativization as "the economy of the film's flow in a binding coherence, its remembering, the realisation of a single forward time within which multiple times can be given play and held" (1981, 109). The linear determination of narrative is produced by the assumption that signification is implicitly linear. The assumption derives from the Saussurian ascription of the originary possibility of language to the spoken utterance, which appears to be a continuous temporal flow. The specification of the "forward" aspect implies that the process is also linear, in the movement from point to point. Derrida's notion of *spacing* indicates that signification is not linear, so the linear structure Heath suggests for narrative is non-fundamental in the formation of meaning in cinema. The classical realist novel, as Barthes shows, and the equivalent in mainstream cinema, are interpreted in a linear reading which reinforces the narrative structuration around the development of beginning, middle and end. The connections between events are minutely specified, in order to establish the chronology of events and suggest character development.

The linear narrative may cite past events or echo passages it has presented earlier in its continuum, and these reinforce the metaphorical forward movement. The introduction of signifiers which connote parallel signifieds may disrupt the closure of the linear reading, and the apparently "non-serious" use of such signifiers, in puns or word games, may break the naturalness of the linear reading. The "primary" connections between narrative events in *Desperately Seeking Susan* are disrupted by networks of signifiers, and the repetition of signifiers in multiple situations negates the transparency of the film.

The narrative presents the word *tricks* in differing contexts, and uses the pun as an example of the *glissement* of the signifier. The three connotations associated with *tricks* in the film occur in the colloquial, "How's tricks," which Susan uses to greet her friend when she is working as magician's assistant; and Lesley provides Gary with an account of housewives who have double lives as prostitutes and who "turn tricks in the city" while their husbands are at work, at which point in the narrative Roberta is working as the magician's assistant, in place of Susan's friend. The signifier provides a network of signifieds, and the representation of puns makes the closure of signification in the narrative problematic; and narrative itself is thereby deprived of authoritarian closure. The film associates Susan with items connoting an Egyptian origin (the earrings, the jacket exchanged has a pyramid on its back, like that on the American one dollar bill, and the cigarette Roberta takes from Susan's bag and attempts to smoke is one of the Camels brand, depicting a pyramid on its packet), and the signifieds originate from the filmic writing, exposing the scene of the film as a collection of signifiers for which linearity is a secondary phenomenon. The grouping of the Egyptian seme extends across the linear organisation of the narrative, so while it helps to define the character of Susan, and Roberta's appropriation of her goods, it disrupts the linear development of the autonomous characters, and interrupts the narrative isolation of Roberta and Susan as "the woman."

The discovery of a document may classically solve an enigma and allow the narrative to take a new turn. *Desperately Seeking Susan* involves many discoveries but none conform to the classical pattern, and contribute to the resistance toward the classification of Susan and Roberta as "the woman." When Susan is staying at the Glass's house in order to assist Gary find Roberta, she discovers Roberta's diary. The discovery is a significant event in the narrative because the diary does not reveal anything about Roberta, except that she desires she were desperate (as she comments in the beauty salon to a woman who replies that Roberta is the only person she knows who isn't desperate), and the messages sent through the newspaper between Jim and Susan. The traditionally feminine activity and genre of diary writing is devoid of Roberta's authorial presence,

and Susan responds to Gary's comment, that she shouldn't have read another person's diary, saying, "It's not about her, it's about me." Among the contents of the diary is the photograph taken by Susan in the hotel, which places the item as a symbol outside the circulation of signs in the patriarchal economy described by Cook and Johnston. The search for Roberta's motivation and inner life results in the dissemination of her original identity, and her identity is signified with material which doubles as Susan's, so the features of Susan's image in Roberta show that Susan's image is inherently plural and transitional, thereby preventing the inscription of a feminine essence. The discovery of the diary allows Susan to determine that Roberta may be contacted through the personal columns, and she asks Gary why he did not know that. Gary replies that he did not think, to which Susan replies, "Fortunately for everybody, I'm here and I'm thinking."

4.6.1. *The Narrativity of the Gaze*

Mulvey claims that classical narrative is structured around the camera as a masculine gaze, which mediates the spectator's gaze, particularly in the objectification of "the woman" and in controlling the narrative progression. The gaze in *Desperately Seeking Susan* is generally detached from a specific reference point, and the mechanistic nature of the recording is evoked to free it from traditional subjectivist assumptions, and to demonstrate that the camera has no inherent specular orientation toward sexual difference. Before Roberta arrives in the kitchen scene, the automatic equipment in the kitchen is shown activating itself. Without the presence of a character, the gaze is not transferable to a subjective point of view, so the mediation of the shots is not elided. The position of the traditional protagonist as the one with an active presence in the narrative is challenged by Roberta's absence and the metaphysics of presence which the notion of the protagonist perpetuates are exposed. The automated representation of activities inscribed with natural femininity displaces the culturally constructed femininity out of the female body/essence, and the programming is non-originary since the procedure is merely the activation of repetition; the temporal aspect of its operation subverts the originary presence of the signified programming action.

The segments of the film which are explicitly related to the gaze of one character

being directed at another unwitting character are mediated, either mechanically, as when Roberta watches Susan through the pay-slot telescope at Battery Park, or such as in the mediation of Des's gaze by a fish tank, when he accidentally sees Roberta trying on Susan's clothes. The mediation of the gaze is an indication that the gaze is a secondary phenomenon in cinema, and does not define it, as Mulvey suggests. The camera has no objectifying nature inherent in its recording processes, so the cinematic image is distinguished from a pure act of seeing, which cannot occur without the mediation of the Symbolic. The gaze may be connoted in a shot, although the shot is not fundamentally structured as the gaze.

4.7. The End of the Film

The conclusion of *Desperately Seeking Susan* does not conform to the traditional manner of demarcation. In a farcical chase sequence, the mistaken identities are exposed and Roberta meets Susan when she intervenes in Nolan's attempt to escape with the earrings while he holds Susan prisoner. The chase scene develops when the characters converge on the *Magic Box* after Susan places an advertisement requesting that Roberta meet her there. The open form of communication is received by all those involved in the pursuit of Susan, Roberta and the earrings, and the characters wait in the audience, not knowing that Roberta is performing. When Nolan observes that Roberta is wearing one of the earrings, he runs onstage and grabs it while she is being sawn in half. When Nolan runs backstage and finds Susan and Jim in a sexual embrace, Jim is literally caught with his pants down, inverting the situation in the speech act theory which suggests that the statement, "I was caught with my pants down," is "heard" in the context which naturalises sexual connotations when spoken by a female to a male. Jim is left in the position of spectacle, without a predetermined spectator position, and as Nolan takes Roberta hostage he appreciates Jim's "nice legs;" the comment undercuts the classical position of "the woman" as hostage, since Jim is represented as a sexual spectacle alongside Susan. Nolan finds that Susan has the second earring, and, as they climb through a window into the dressing room where Roberta is sitting, Susan signals to

Roberta to strike Nolan on the head with a bottle, which she does. Susan says, "Good going, stranger," in an ambiguous manner, for the tone is one of familiarity, and "stranger" is effectively a proper noun, since Roberta signs her advertisement, "A Stranger." Roberta murmurs, "Susan," and laughter breaks out between them as Jim crashes through the window. In the section which follows the chase sequence, the audience may expect that remaining loose threads in the narrative are gathered together and the story concluded. However, the continuity is fragmented between the two final scenes which follow the chase.

The penultimate scene occurs in the projection room and auditorium of a cinema, where Des works as the projectionist. A science fiction film is screening and parts of its dialogue occur in the soundtrack as Roberta enters to tell Des her name in a context where he will believe her (she has tried to tell him before), undermining the absolute notion of truth and its implication of revelation. In the intruding film narrative, of which shots are provided, a group (of men) is attempting to solve the crisis arising from a "bad combination" of events, and they consider using androids to avert the attack pending from a group of mutants. The androids are machines representing themselves as human, while the mutants may be humanoid with an inhuman exterior, and, in relation to the confusion of identity and the Symbolic nature of Susan's character, this disrupts the context of the final settlement of identity which the conclusion would conventionally offer. Roberta and Des kiss, accidentally switching off the projector and the projected film is shown melting away. The scene parodies the excessive significance attributed to the historically naturalised Hollywood kiss scene and its narrative-halting effect. In a shot taken from the position of the screen, Susan and Jim are shown enjoying themselves in the audience, at which point Madonna's theme song begins playing; the narrative provides another shot of the melted frame being projected onto the screen, and the white space is replaced as the final black and white sequence is faded in.

The black and white segment, accompanied in the soundtrack by "Into the Groove," shows Roberta and Susan being presented with a cheque, which they both hold and wave above their heads, side by side. The image is then frozen as a photograph and is

transferred onto the cover of *The Mirror*, where it appears under the ambiguous headline, "What a pair," along with a photograph of the earrings and a subheadline, "Stolen earrings returned." The cover has some text, and titles of stories on other pages: "He'll get an F in conduct this time around," and "If I'd had a gun I'd have used it." The titles of stories on other pages re-iterate the themes that have been circulating through the film, but they do not finally encompass the narrative, while the titles themselves refer outside the scope of the narrative, disseminating their point of origin. The story concerning the gun evokes desperation, while the, "He'll get an F in conduct ...," piece re-iterates the difference of *Desperately Seeking Susan* from the traditional cinematic narrative, and the non-binary scale makes the grading of the female protagonists, by way of antithetical categorisation, impossible.

In the final photographic image, Roberta and Susan clasp their hands together around a cheque, and by joining their arms above their heads they form a phallic symbol. The pose is similar to that featuring a single model reflected in a mirror, incorporated by Kolbowski in her *Model Pleasure, Part Seven* (1984); and in *Desperately Seeking Susan* the glass double is evoked by Roberta's surname (Glass). The use of Roberta to replace the reflection is not an essentialising gesture, making Roberta and Susan identical, because the narrative has signified the irreducible nature of the female protagonists' identities. The use of the theme song, to pluralise Madonna's presence in the final section, disrupts closure and the notion that she has been captured in the final photograph, because it plays across the boundary between sections and into the credits. The conversion from colour to monotone is naturalised by the formation of the newspaper image in black and white, which is an instance of the signified being recontextualised by an appropriated system of representation, and the photograph, which the narrative has emptied of transparent meaning, undercuts the position of "the woman" as the last point of narrative resistance and locus of truth. The narrative, like Kolbowski's project, shows the conflicting use of "the woman" as truth and the bias in traditional representation toward what is connoted as masculine desire. Kolbowski destabilises representation in general, rather than making an attempt to posit a different

"feminine" content in the traditional closure of meaning; similarly, *Desperately Seeking Susan* may be interpreted traditionally as the story of the search for Susan and the complication which results when identities are confused and a jewelry theft interlaced. However, the narrative representation disrupts such elision of the film medium from the signification of the narrative.

4.8. Representation in Cinema: Conclusions

The analogical medium of film signifies without a set of categorisable signifiers, which indicates that representation is not reducible to a basic autonomous structure. Some film theorists attempt to posit signifying structures in cinema, such as the relationship between shots, the gaze, stylistic features and narrative conventions. However, none of the structures is fundamental. The desire to trace the origin of the signified is elicited by the self-effacement of representation, which presents itself as fully present meaning. The presence of meaning is not full, however, and is the trace of the erasure of *différance*.

Theories which focus on specific contexts of meaning may develop those contexts, such as the fetishised image and the Mirror Stage, into the privileged locus of meaning, which elides the nature of the medium. Although the medium cannot be isolated as a pure expressive phenomenon, the cinematic representation of the features investigated by psychoanalytic criticism must be accounted for.

The work of feminist critics who locate their objectives in relation to the nature of representation may be more successful than conventional criticism in disrupting the traditional closures and erasures which produce the essentialist representation of "the woman." *Desperately Seeking Susan* incorporates material which destabilises the representation of "the woman" by focussing on the nature of the representation, rather than on specific theories of meaning. The "presence" of Madonna interrupts the traditional narrative closure, since her identity is disunified by the nature of her appearance, and the disjunction between the visual and aural origins of Susan/Madonna, in the disco scene and closing sequence, emphasises the film's mediation within the Symbolic, and detaches it from the possibility of transparent presentation of an

unmediated "reality."

General Conclusion

In my examination of representation in contemporary text theory, I find that meaning is generally posited in a context which elides mediation. The spoken utterance is the most frequently cited context in which meaning is naturalised, and the transparency and immediacy of the signified's arrival from its posited origin provides an ideal to which all representation is thought to aspire.

Derrida examines the orientation of Western metaphysics toward the voice as a locus of truth and unveiling; following Derrida, my investigation concludes that the idealisation of meaning in communication, as the veiled truth, is a common theme which dictates the approach to representation in Barthes, Lacan and Western culture in general.

The autonomy of the privileged scene of representation is disrupted when it is shown to have a common origin, in the differential signifying chain. The loss of the transparency of meaning, such as in the closure of authorial presence or the figure of "the woman," places the text in an indefinable context, which denies the deduction of fundamental meaning from representation. As such, representation is not a secondary phenomenon, but is the basis from which the nature of the origin is determined.

The self-veiling trace of *différance* erases its differential origin by presenting the presence of the signified. So, the erasure of mediation may involve both the erasure by the signified of its origin, and the erasure of signification in the idealisation of meaning.

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